Always
Comes Evening

ALWAYS COMES EVENING

by

Robert E. Howard

Illustrated by Keiko Nelson

This original, primary collection of Robert E. Howard's poetry came into being through the efforts and research of Glenn Lord. This volume contains all of Howard's major poems from Weird Tales magazine, as well as verse from such obscure publications as The Phantograph, Fanciful Tales, and Oriental Stories.

Illustrations and dust wrapper by Keiko Nelson.

Introduction by Glenn Lord.

UNDERWOOD
MILLER

ly
on of June in "Sir Lounfal"

Febuary day?
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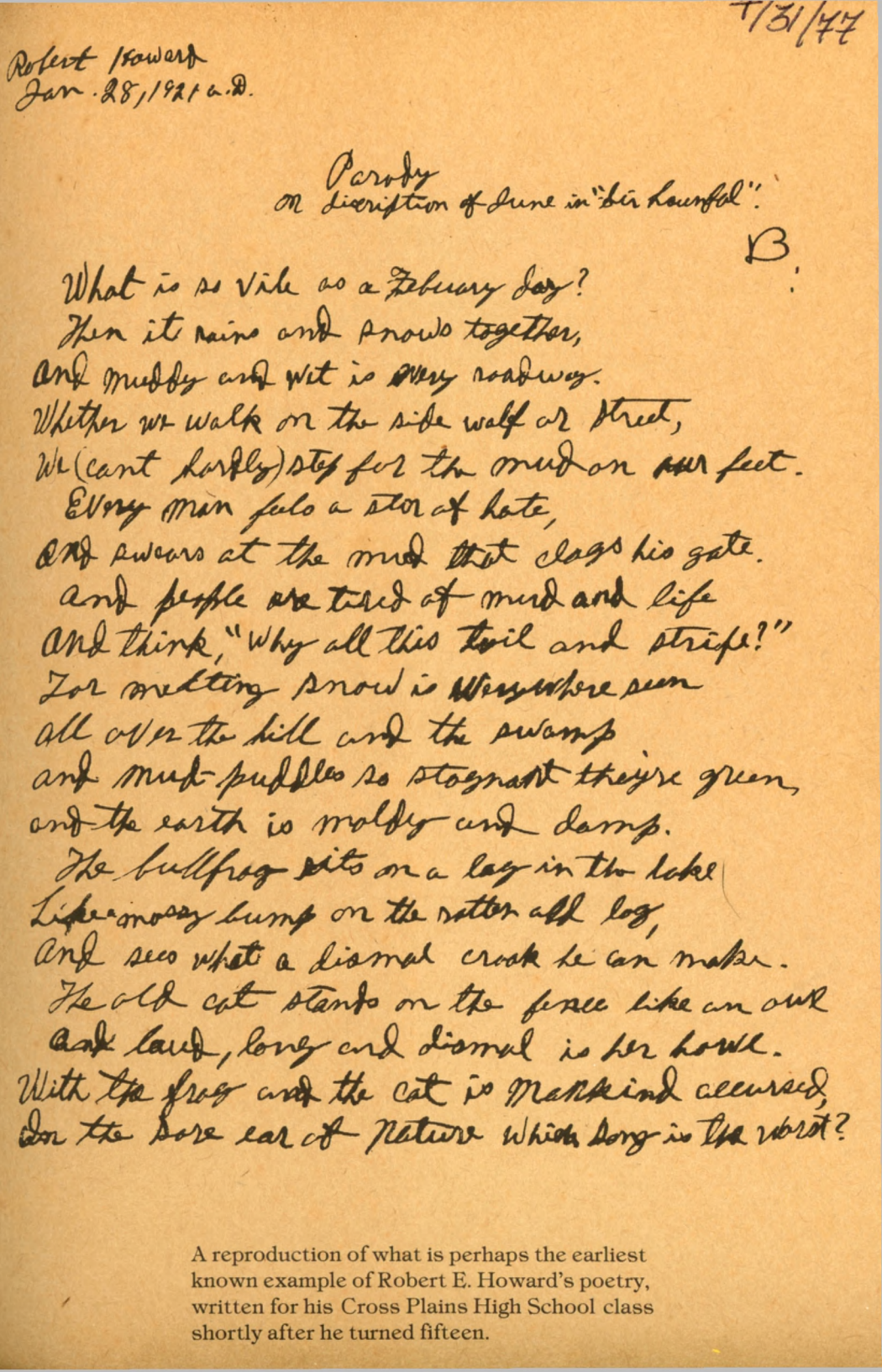
Robert Howard
Jan. 28, 1921 A.D.

Parody
on discription of June in "Sir Lounfal"

What is so vile as a Febuary day?
When it rains and snows together,
And muddy and wet is every roadway.
Whether we walk on the side walk or street,
We cant hardly step for the mud on our feet.
Every man feels a stir of hate,
And swears at the mud that clogs his gate.
And people are tired of mud and life
And think, "Why all this toil and strife?"
For melting snow is everywhere seen
All over the hill and the swamp
And mud-puddles so stagnant they're green,
And the earth is moldy and damp.
The bullfrog sits on a log in the lake
Like a mossy bump on the rotten old log,
And sees what a dismal croak he can make.
The old cat stands on the fence like an owl
And loud, lonely and dismal is her howl.
With the frog and the cat is Mankind accursed,
In the sore ear of Nature which song is the worst?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A reproduction of what is perhaps the earliest known example of Robert E. Howard's poetry, written for his Cross Plains High School class shortly after he turned fifteen.

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poetry by
Robert E. Howard

compiled by Glenn Lord
illustrated by Keiko Nelson

UNDERWOOD – MILLER
San Francisco, California
Columbia, Pennsylvania
1977

ALWAYS COMES EVENING

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Poems in this volume originally appeared in Weird Tales, The Phantagraph, The Fantasy Fan, Fanciful Tales, Oriental Stories, Modern American Poetry, and Ariel.

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The first edition of ALWAYS COMES EVENING was published in 1957 by Arkham House. It took seven years to sell out the 636-copy printing which retailed for $3; it is now of the most sought Arkham House titles with copies selling for well in excess of $100. What is not so commonly known is that this was one of three titles (according to THIRTY YEARS OF ARKHAM HOUSE) that Arkham House published for someone else.

During 1956, the late Dale Hart was temporarily living with his parents at their home in Highlands, Texas. I was attending Lee College at Baytown on a part-time basis. Since Highlands lies between Pasadena and Baytown, I was a frequent visitor at the Hart home. It was during one of those visits that I expressed the wish that someone collect Robert E. Howard's poetry in a collection similar to the Leah Bodine Drake (A HORNBOOK FOR WITCHES) and Clark Ashton Smith (THE DARK CHATEAU) volumes that Arkham House had published. Both Dale and I were intrigued by the idea; I so much so, that I went home and immediately wrote to the late Oscar J. Friend, then the agent for the Howard heirs. Friend and I came to an agreement and it was at this time I learned that, apart from a few tearsheets, the agent had no copies of the poetry nor any records of where any of it had been published.

Fortunately, there are indexes to Weird Tales, and I was soon able to locate copies of most of the issues containing Howard verse. Larry Farsace and Donald A. Wollheim graciously supplied me with copies of poems from such amateur publications as The Fantasy Fan and The Phantagraph; Don also went to the New York Public Library and copied out the two poems in the Gerta Aison anthology, MODERN AMERICAN POETRY.

But the question remained: were there any unpublished poems? I recalled that the H.P. Lovecraft memory of Howard from

SKULL-FACE AND OTHERS mentioned that a Robert E. Howard Memorial Collection had been established at Howard Payne College in Brownwood shortly after Howard's death. From Oscar Friend I learned that the Howard heirs lived at Ranger, not far from Brownwood. A trip to Central Texas was the next move.

At Howard Payne College I learned from Dr. Thomas R. Havins that Dr. Howard had removed the magazines and papers from the library when he learned that the materials were not being given what he considered proper care (Many years later I learned that this happened early in 1937). Dr. Havins did have perhaps a half dozen items that had somehow been overlooked; one of these was the poem "The Tempter." I was not to learn until many years later that this poem had been published in the Cross Plains newspaper in 1937.

Results were negative at Cross Plains, although I did locate and speak with Lindsey W. Tyson, one of Howard's closest friends, who said that as he recalled, there was about "a ream" of unpublished verse left at his death. Maybe, I thought, the heirs now had these...

At Ranger, I met Dr. P.M. Kuykendall, who informed me that I was the first person who had ever visited him regarding Howard. I was disappointed to learn that he had no manuscripts and in fact knew very little about Howard. As I was about to leave he suggested that I look up Bill Chambers who had known the Howards quite well.

I located Chambers on his farm outside the little town of May. He had known Dr. Howard quite well; Robert only slightly. But, he added, his nephew, Norris Chambers, had known Robert rather well. As he did not know his address, he referred me to Norris' sister, Mrs. Dioma Morgan, who lived in Brownwood. From her I learned that he lived in Fort Worth.

Dale Hart was then living in the Dallas area and offered to approach Norris Chambers. This turned out to be the one major break in my research for ALWAYS COMES EVENING for Chambers had a number of unpublished poems that he had received in letters from Howard.

Frank Utpatel had already completed the jacket drawing for the book, one very similar to those he did for the Arkham House poetry volumes. And so, with the typescript for ALWAYS COMES EVENING prepared, I began pricing printing and binding and soon learned that local prices would necessitate a higher retail price that I wanted to place on the book. I mentioned the matter to August Derleth, who suggested that I might wish to have it published for me by Arkham House; I would pay the printing costs and as the book sold, Arkham House would repay me, deducting a handling charge from the proceeds. Thus, ALWAYS COMES EVENING became an Arkham House title, and in retrospect I am glad.

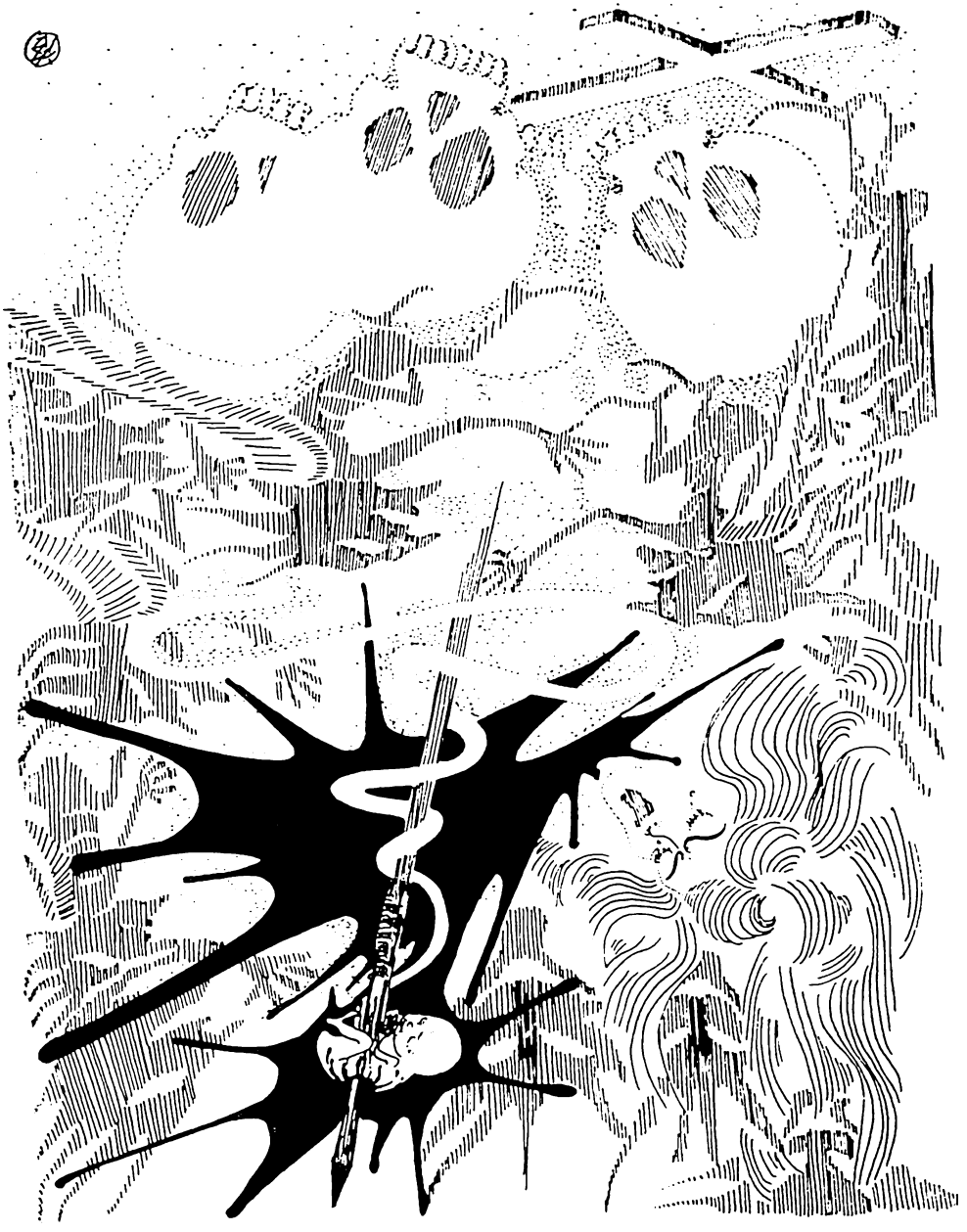
The book was presented as "the collected poetry of Robert E. Howard" but anyone who cares to consult my recent bio-bibliography of Howard, THE LAST CELT, will see that it was far from a complete collection of Howard's verse.

The present edition of ALWAYS COMES EVENING is not simply a reprint of the first edition. Dale Hart's Introduction and my Foreword have been dropped in favor of this Introduction. The poems have been completely rearranged by the publisher. About ten years ago I learned that five of the sonnets posthumously published in Weird Tales had been part of a sonnet sequence, "Sonnets out of Bedlam," and the series entitled "Voices of the Night" contained not two, but five, poems. One of the latter, "A Crown for a King," was not in the first edition of ALWAYS COME EVENING, but is included herein. And, finally, the present volume has been enhanced by the artwork of the Japanese artist Keiko Nelson.

Pasadena, Texas
9 March 1977

Glenn Lord

Always Comes Evening



Poems from WEIRD TALES

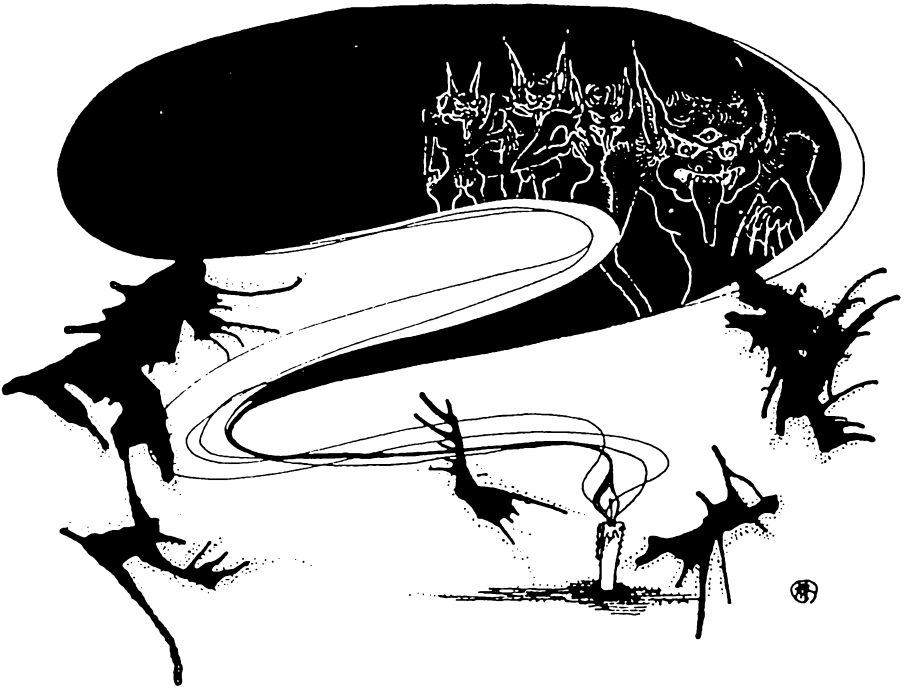
Fragment

And so his boyhood wandered into youth,
And still the hazes thickened round his head,
And red, lascivious nightmares shared his bed
And fantasies with greedy claw and tooth
Burrowed into the secret parts of him —
Gigantic, bestial and misshapen paws
Gloatingly fumbled each white youthful limb,
And shadows lurked with scarlet gaping jaws.

Deeper and deeper in a twisting maze
Of monstrous shadows, shot with red and black,
Or gray as dull decay and rainy days,
He stumbled onward. Over at his back
He heard the lecherous laughter of the ghouls.
Under the fungoid trees lay stagnant pools
Wherein he sometimes plunged up to his waist
And shrieked and scrambled out with loathing haste,
Feeling unnumbered slimy fingers press
His shrinking flesh with evil, dank caress.

Life was a cesspool of obscenity —
He saw through eyes accursed with unveiled sight —
Where Lust ran rampant through a screaming Night
And black-faced swine roared from the Devil's styes;
Where grinning corpses, fiend-inhabited,
Walked through the world with taloned hands outspread;
Where beast and monster swaggered side by side,
And unseen demons strummed a maddening tune;
And naked witches, young and brazen-eyed,
Flaunted their buttocks to a lustful moon.

Rank, shambling devils chased him night on night,
And caught and bore him to a flaming hall,
Where lambent in the flaring crimson light
A thousand long-tongued faces lined the wall.
And there they flung him, naked and a-sprawl
Before a great dark woman's ebon throne.
How dark, inhuman, strange, her deep eyes shone!



The Song of a Mad Minstrel

I am the thorn in the foot, I am the blur in the sight;
I am the worm at the root, I am the thief in the night.
I am the rat in the wall, the leper that leers at the gate;
I am the ghost in the hall, herald of horror and hate.

I am the rust on the corn, I am the smut on the wheat,
Laughing man's labor to scorn, weaving a web for his feet.
I am canker and mildew and blight, danger and death and decay;
The rot of the rain by night, the blast of the sun by day.

I warp and wither with drouth, I work in the swamp's foul yeast;
I bring the black plague from the south and the leprosy in from the east.
I rend from the hemlock boughs wine steeped in the petals of dooms;
Where the fat black serpents drowse I gather the Upas blooms.

I have plumbed the northern ice for a spell like frozen lead;
In lost gray fields of rice, I have learned from Mongol dead.
Where a bleak black mountain stands I have looted grisly caves;
I have digged in the desert sands to plunder terrible graves.

Never the sun goes forth, never the moon glows red,
But out of the south or the north, I come with the slavering dead.
I come with hideous spells, black chants and ghastly tunes;
I have looted the hidden hells and plundered the lost black moons.

There was never a king or priest to cheer me by word or look,
There was never a man or beast in the blood-black ways I took.
There were crimson gulfs unplumbed, there were black wings over a sea;
There were pits where mad things drummed, and foaming blasphemy.

There were vast ungodly tombs where slimy monsters dreamed;
There were clouds like blood-drenched plumes where unborn demons
screamed.
There were ages dead to Time, and lands lost out of Space;
There were adders in the slime, and a dim unholy Face.

Oh, the heart in my breast turned stone, and the brain froze in my skull —
But I won through, I alone, and poured my chalice full
Of horrors and dooms and spells, black buds and bitter roots—
From the hells beneath the hells, I bring you my deathly fruits.

Remembrance

Eight thousand years ago a man I slew;
I lay in wait beside a sparkling rill
There in an upland valley green and still.
The white stream gurgled where the rushes grew;
The hills were veiled in dreamy hazes blue.
He came along the trail; with savage skill
My spear leaped like a snake to make my kill—
Leaped like a striking snake and pierced him through.

And still when blue haze dreams along the sky
And breezes bring the murmur of the sea,
A whisper thrills me where at ease I lie
Beneath the branches of some mountain tree;
He comes, fog-dim, the ghost that will not die,
And with accusing finger points at me.

The Moor Ghost

They haled him to the crossroads
As day was at its close;
They hung him to the gallows
And left him for the crows.

His hands in life were bloody,
His ghost will not be still
He haunts the naked moorlands
About the gibbet hill.

And oft a lonely traveler
Is found upon the fen
Whose dead eyes hold a horror
Beyond the world of men.

The villagers then whisper,
With accents grim and dour:
"This man has met at midnight
The phantom of the moor."

Dead Man's Hate

They hanged John Farrel in the dawn amid the marketplace;
At dusk came Adam Brand to him and spat upon his face.
"Ho neighbors all," spake Adam Brand, "see ye John Farrel's fate!
'Tis proven here a hempen noose is stronger than man's hate!

For heard ye not John Farrel's vow to be avenged on me
Come life or death? See how he hangs high on the gallows tree!"
Yet never a word the people spake, in fear and wild surprise —
For the grisly corpse raised up its head and stared with sightless eyes,

And with strange motions, slow and stiff, pointed at Adam Brand
And clambered down the gibbet tree, the noose within its hand.
With gaping mouth stood Adam Brand like a statue carved of stone,
Till the dead man laid a clammy hand hard on his shoulder-bone.

Then Adam shrieked like a soul in hell; the red blood left his face
And he reeled away in a drunken run through the screaming market place;
And close behind, the dead man came with a face like a mummy's mask,
And the dead joints cracked and the stiff legs creaked with their unwonted ta

Men fled before the flying twain or shrank with bated breath,
And they saw on the face of Adam Brand the seal set there by death.
He reeled on buckling legs that failed, yet on and on he fled;
So through the shuddering market-place, the dying fled the dead.

At the riverside fell Adam Brand with a scream that rent the skies;
Across him fell John Farrel's corpse, nor ever the twain did rise.
There was no wound on Adam Brand but his brow was cold and damp,
For the fear of death had blown out his life as a witch blows out a lamp.

His lips were writhed in a horrid grin like a fiend's on Satan's coals,
And the men that looked on his face that day, his stare still haunts their sou
Such was the fate of Adam Brand, a strange, unearthly fate;
For stronger than death or hempen noose are the fires of a dead man's hat

The Ride of Falume

Falume of Spain rode forth amain when twilight's crimson fell
To drink a toast with Bahram's ghost in the scarlet land of Hell
His rowels clashed as swift he dashed along the flaming skies;
The sunset rade at his bridle braid and the moon was in his eyes.
The waves were green with an eery sheen over the hills of Thule
And the ripples beat to his horse's feet like a serpent in a pool
On vampire wings the shadow things wheeled round and round his head,
Till he came at last to a kingdom vast in the Land of the Restless Dead.

They thronged about in a grisly rout, they caught at his silver rein;
"Avaunt, foul host! Tell Bahram's ghost Falume has come from Spain!"
Then flame-arrayed rose Bahram's shade: "What would ye have, Falume?"
"Ho, Bahram who on earth I slew where Tagus' waters boom,
Now though I shore your life of yore amid the burning West,
I ride to Hell to bid ye tell where I might ride to rest.
My beard is white and dim my sight and I would fain be gone.
Speak without guile: where lies the isle of mystic Avalon?"

"A league beyond the western wind, a mile beyond the moon,
Where the dim seas roar on an unknown shore and the drifting stars lie strewn:
The lotus buds there scent the woods where the quiet rivers gleam,
And king and knight in the mystic light the ages drowse and dream."

With sudden bound Falume wheeled round, he fled through the flying wrack
Till he came again to the land of Spain with the sunset at his back.
"No dreams for me, but living free, red wine and battle's roar;
I breast the gales and I ride the trails until I ride no more."

Arkham

Drowsy and dull with age the houses blink
On aimless streets the rat-gnawed years forget —
But what inhuman figures leer and slink
Down the old alleys when the moon has set?

Crete

The green waves wash above us
Who slumber in the bay
As washed the tide of ages
That swept our race away.

Our cities — dusty ruins;
Our galleys — deep-sea slime;
Our very ghosts, forgotten,
Bow to the sweep of Time.

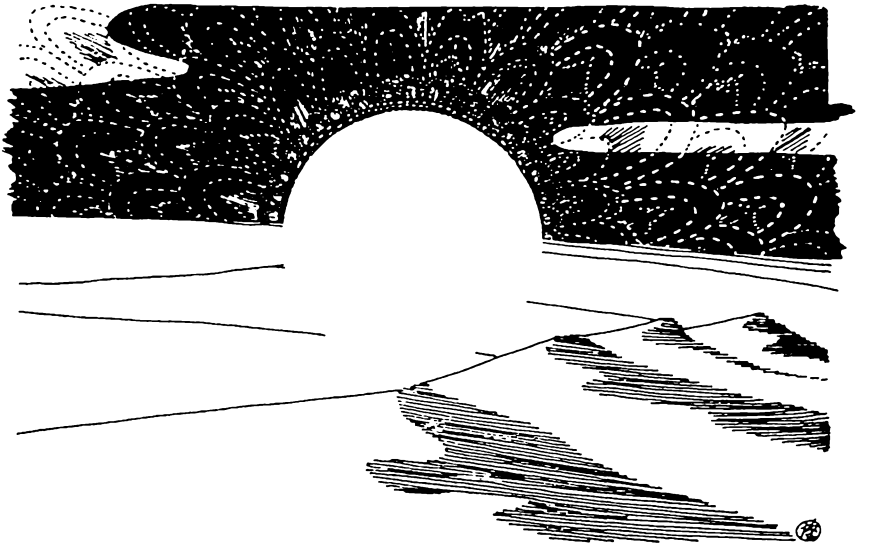
Our land lies stark before it
As we to alien spears,
But, ah, the love we bore it
Outlasts the crawling years.

Ah, jeweled spires at even —
The lute's soft golden sigh —
The Lion-Gates of Knossos
When dawn was in the sky.

Desert Dawn

Dim seas swim slowly into sight
As if from out the silence swiftly born;
Faint foremost herald of the coming morn,
Red tentacles reach out into the night;
The shadows gray, then fade to rosy white.
The stars fade out, the greatest and the least;
Now a red rose is blooming in the east,
And from its widening petals comes the light.

White, fleecy clouds are fading from on high,
The sun-god flings afar his golden brands;
A breeze springs up and races 'mid the dunes,
A-whisper with old tales and mystic runes;
Now blue and gold ride rampant in the sky,
And now full day comes marching o'er the sands.



The Riders of Babylon

The riders of Babylon clatter forth
Like the hawk-winged scourgers of Azrael
To the meadow-lands of the South and North
And the strong-walled cities of Israel.
They harry the men of the caravans,
They bring rare plunder across the sands
To deck the throne of the great god Baal.
But Babylon's king is a broken shell
And Babylon's queen is a sprite from hell
And men shall say, "Here Babylon fell,"
Ere Time has forgot the tale.

The riders of Babylon come and go
From Gaza's halls to the shores of Tyre;
They shake the world from the lands of snow
To the deserts, red in the sunset's fire;
Their horses swim in a sea of gore
And the tribes of the earth bow down before;
They have chained the seas where the Cretans sail.
But Babylon's sun shall set in blood;
Her towers shall sink in a crimson flood;
And men shall say, "Here Babylon stood,"
Ere Time forgot the tale.

Shadows on the Road

Nial of Ulster, welcome home!
What saw you on the road to Rome? —
Legions thronging the fertile plains?
Shouting hordes of the country folk
With the harvest heaped in their groaning wains?
Shepherd piping under the oak?
Laurel chaplet and purple cloak?
Smokes of the feasting coiled on high?
Meadows and fields of the rich, ripe green
Lazing under a cobalt sky?
Brown little villages sleeping between?
What saw you on the road to Rome?

"Crimson tracks in the blackened loam,
"Skeleton trees and a blasted plain,
"A heap of skulls and a child insane,
"Ruin and wreck and the reek of pain
"On the wrack of the road to Rome."

Nial, what saw you in Rome? —
Purple emperors riding there,
Down aisles with walls like marble foam,
To the golden trumpet's mystic flare?
Dark-eyed women who bind their hair,
As they bind men's hearts, with a silver comb?
Spires that cleave through the crystal air,
Arch and altar and amaranth stair?
Nial, what saw you in Rome?

"Broken shrines in the sobbing gloam,
"Bare feet spurning the marble flags,
"Towers fallen and walls digged up,
"A woman in chains and filty rags.
"Goths in the Forum howled to sup,
"With an emperor's skull for a drinking-cup.
"The black arch clave to the broken dome.
"The Coliseum invites the bat,
"The Vandal sits where the Caesars sat;
"And the shadows are black on Rome."

Nial, Nial, now you are home,
Why do you mutter and lonely roam?

"My brain is sick and I know no rest;
"My heart is stone in my frozen breast,
"For the feathers fall from the eagle's crest
"And the bright sea breaks in foam —
"Kings and kingdoms and empires fall,
"And the mist-black ruin covers them all,
"And the honey of life is a bitter gall
"Since I travelled the road to Rome."

The Harp of Alfred

I heard the harp of Alfred
As I went o'er the downs,
When thorn-trees stood at even
Like monks in dusky gowns;
I heard the music Guthrum heard
Beside the wasted towns;

When Alfred, like a peasant,
Came harping down the hill,
And the drunken Danes made merry
With the man they sought to kill,
And the Saxon king laughed in their beards
And bent them to his will.

I heard the harp of Alfred
As twilight waned to night;
I heard ghost armies tramping
As the dim stars flamed white;
And Guthrum walked at my left hand,
And Alfred at my right.

Moon Mockery

I walked in Tara's wood one summer night,
And saw, amid the still, star-haunted skies,
A slender moon in silver mist arise,
And hover on the hill as if in fright.
Burning, I seized her veil and held her tight:
An instant all her glow was in my eyes;
Then she was gone, swift as a white bird flies,
And I went down the hill in opal light.

And soon I was aware, as down I came,
That all was strange and new on every side;
Strange people went about me to and fro,
And when I spoke with trembling mine own name
They turned away, but one man said: "He died
In Tara Wood, a hundred years ago."

A Song Out of Midian

These I will give to you, Astair: an armlet of frozen gold
Gods cut from the living rock, and carven gems in an amber crock,
And a purple woven Tyrian smock, and wine from a pirate's hold.

Kings shall kneel at your feet, Astair, emperors kiss your hand;
Captive girls for your joy shall dance, slim and straight as a striking lance,
Who tremble and bow at your mildest glance and kneel at your least command.

Galleys shall break the crimson seas seeking delights for you;
With silks and silvery fountain gleams I will weave a world that glows and seem
A shimmering mist of rainbow dreams, scarlet and white and blue.

Or is it glory you wish, Astair, the clash and the battle-flame?
The winds shall break on the warship's sail and Death ride free at my horse's ta
Till all of the tribes of the earth shall wail at the terror of your name.

I will break the thrones of the world, Astair, and fling them at your feet;
Flame and banners and doom shall fly, and my iron chariot rend the sky,
Whirlwind on whirlwind heaping high, death and a deadly sleet.

Why are you sad and still, Astair, counting my words as naught?
From slave to queen I have raised you high, and yet you stare with a weary eye,
And never the laugh has followed the sigh, since you from your land were brou

Do you long for the lowering herds, Astair? For the desert's dawning white?
For the hawk-eyed tribesmen's coarse hard fare, and the brown firm limbs
that are hard and bare,
And the eagle's rocks and the lion's lair, and the tents of the Israelite?

I have never chained your limbs, Astair; free as the winds that whirl
Go if you wish. The doors are wide, since less to you is an empire's pride
Than the open lands where the tribesmen ride, wooing the desert girl.

The Ghost Kings

The ghost kings are marching; the midnight knows their tread,
From the distant, stealthy planets of the dim, unstable dead;
There are whisperings on the night-winds and the shuddering stars
have fled.

A ghostly trumpet echoes from a barren mountain head;
Through the fen the wandering witch-lights gleam like phantom arrows
sped;
There is silence in the valleys and the moon is rising red.

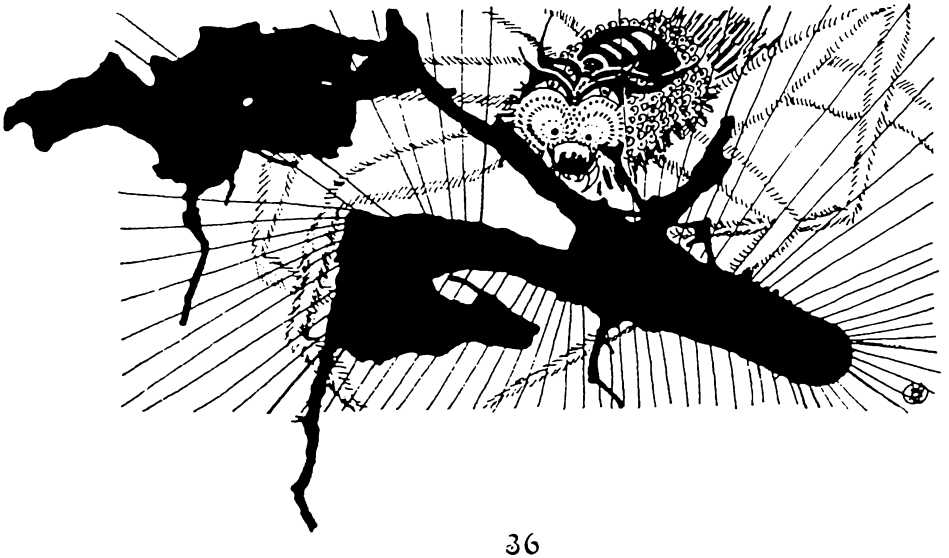
The ghost kings are marching down the ages' dusty maze;
The unseen feet are tramping through the moonlight's pallid haze,
Down the hollow clanging stairways of a million yesterdays.

The ghost kings are marching, where the vague moon-vapor creeps,
While the night-wind to their coming, like a thund'rous herald sweeps;
They are clad in ancient grandeur, but the world, unheeding, sleeps.

Forbidden Magic

There came to me a Shape one summer night
When all the world lay silent in the stars
And moonlight crossed my room with ghostly bars.
It whispered hints of weird unhollowed sight;
I followed, then in waves of spectral light
Mounted the shimmery ladders of my soul,
Where moon-pale spiders, huge as dragons, stole —
Great forms like moths with wings of whispy white.

Then round the world the sighing of the loon
Shook misty lakes beneath the false dawn's gleams.
Rose-tinted shone the skyline's minaret.
I rose in fear and then with blood and sweat
Beat out the iron fabrics of my dreams
And shaped of them a web to snare the moon.



Recompense

I have not heard lutes beckon me, nor the brazen bugles call,
But once in the dim of a haunted lea I heard the silence fall.
I have not heard the regal drum, nor seen the flags unfurled,
But I have watched the dragons come, fire-eyed, across the world.

I have not seen the horsemen fall before the hurtling host,
But I have paced a silent hall where each step waked a ghost.
I have not kissed the tiger-feet of a strange-eyed golden god,
But I have walked a city's street where no man else had trod.

I have not raised the canopies that shelter revelling kings,
But I have fled from crimson eyes and black unearthly wings.
I have not knelt outside the door to kiss a pallid queen.
But I have seen a ghostly shore that no man else has seen.

I have not seen the standards sweep from keep and castle wall,
But I have seen a woman leap from a dragon's crimson stall
And I have heard strange surges boom that no man heard before,
And seen a strange black city loom on a mystic night-black shore.

And I have felt the sudden blow of a nameless wind's cold breath,
And watched the grisly pilgrims go that walk the roads of Death,
And I have seen black valleys gape, abysses in the gloom,
And I have fought the deathless Ape that guards the Doors of Doom.

I have not seen the face of Pan, nor mocked the dryad's haste,
But I have trailed a dark-eyed man across a windy waste.
I have not died as men may die, nor sinned as men have sinned,
But I have reached a misty sky upon a granite wind.

The Song of the Bats

The dusk was on the mountain
And the stars were dim and frail
When the bats came flying, flying
From the river and the vale
To wheel against the twilight
And sing their witchy tale.

"We were kings of eld!" they chanted,
"Rulers of a world enchanted;
"Every nation of creation
"Owned our lordship over men.
"Diadems of power crowned us,
"Then rose Solomon to confound us,
"Flung his web of magic round us,
"In the form of beasts he bound us,
"So our rule was broken then."

Whirling, wheeling into westward,
Fled they in their phantom flight;
Was it but a wing-beat music
Mumured through the star-gemmed night?
Or the singing of a ghost clan
Whispering of forgotten might?

Ships

There's a far, lone island in the dim, red west,
Where the sea-waves are crimson with the red of burnished gold
(Sapphire in the billows, gold upon the crest),
An island that is older than the continents are old.

Sailing-ships are anchored about that ancient isle,
Ships that sailed the oceans in the dim dawn days,
Coracles from Britain, triremes from the Nile.
Anchored round the harbors, anchored mile on mile,
Ships and ships and shades of ships fading in the haze.

And there's a Roman galley with its seven banks of oars,
And there's a golden bargeboat that knew the Caesar's hand,
And there's a somber pirate craft with shattered cabin doors,
And there's a sturdy bireme that sailed to Holy Land.

Main-trees lifting like a forest of the south,
Beaked prows looming, and the wide courses furled,
Dim decks heel-marked, marked by rain and drouth,
Spindrift in the cross-trees, drift of southern seas,
Dim ships, strong ships from all about the world.

High ships, proud ships, towering at their poops,
Galleons flaunting their pinnacles of pride,
Schooners and merchantmen, and long, lean sloops,
Kings' ships riding with galleys on the tide.

The King and the Oak

Before the shadows slew the sun the kites were soaring free,
And Kull rode down the forest road, his red sword at his knee;
And winds were whispering round the world: "King Kull rides to the sea."

The sun died crimson in the sea, the long gray shadows fell;
The moon rose like a silver skull that wrought a demon's spell,
For in its light great trees stood up like specters out of hell.

In spectral light the trees stood up, inhuman monsters dim;
Kull thought each trunk a living shape, each branch a knotted limb,
And strange unmortal evil eyes flamed horribly at him.

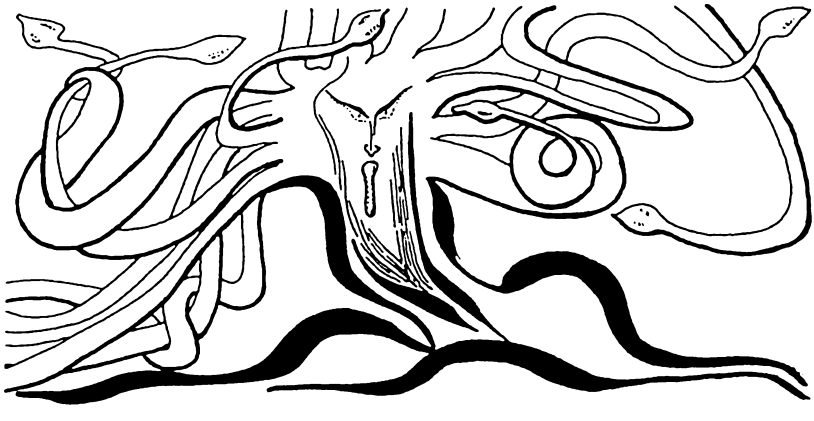
The branches writhed like knotted snakes, they beat against the night,
And one great oak with swayings stiff, horrific in his sight,
Tore up its roots and blocked his way, grim in the ghostly light.

They grappled in the forest way, the king and grisly oak;
Its great limbs bent him in their grip, but never a word was spoke;
And futile in his iron hand, the stabbing dagger broke.

And through the tossing, monstrous trees there sang a dim refrain
Frought deep with twice a million years of evil, hate and pain:
"We were the lords ere man had come and shall be lords again."

Kull sensed an empire strange and old that bowed to man's advance
As kingdoms of the glass-blades bow before the marching ants,
And horror gripped him in the dawn like someone in a trance.

He strove with bloody hands against a still and silent tree;
As from a nightmare dream he woke; a wind blew down the lea,
And Kull of high Atlantis rode silent to the sea.



Futility

Golden goats on a hillside black,
Silken hose on a wharf-side trull,
Naked girl on a silver rack —
What are dreams in a shadowed skull?

I stood at a shrine and Chiron died,
A woman laughed from the bawdy roofs,
And he burned and lived and rose in his pride
And shattered the tiles with clanging hoofs.

I opened a volume dark and rare,
I lit a candle of mystic lore —
Bare feet throbbed on the outer stair
And the candle faltered to the floor.

Ships that sail on a windy sea,
Lovers that take the world to wife,
What doth the harlot hold for me
Who scarce have lifted the veil of Life?

Autumn

Now is the lyre of Homer flecked with rust,
And yellow leaves are blown across the world,
And naked trees that shake at every gust
Stand gaunt against the clouds autumnal-curled.

Now from the hollow moaning of the sea
The dreary birds against the sunset fly,
And drifting down the sad wind's ghostly dree
A breath of music echoes with a sigh.

The barren branch shakes down the withered fruit,
The seas faint footprints on the strand erase;
The sere leaves fall on a forgotten lute,
And autumn's arms enfold a dying race.

The Poets

Out of the somber night the poets come,
A moment brief to fan their lambent flame;
Then, like the dimming whisper of a drum,
Fades back into the night from whence they came.

The gray fog, swirling cloak of cynic Time,
Meshes achievement in the ages' gloom,
A moment's mirth, a breath of lilting rime,
And then — the gray of old oblivion's womb.

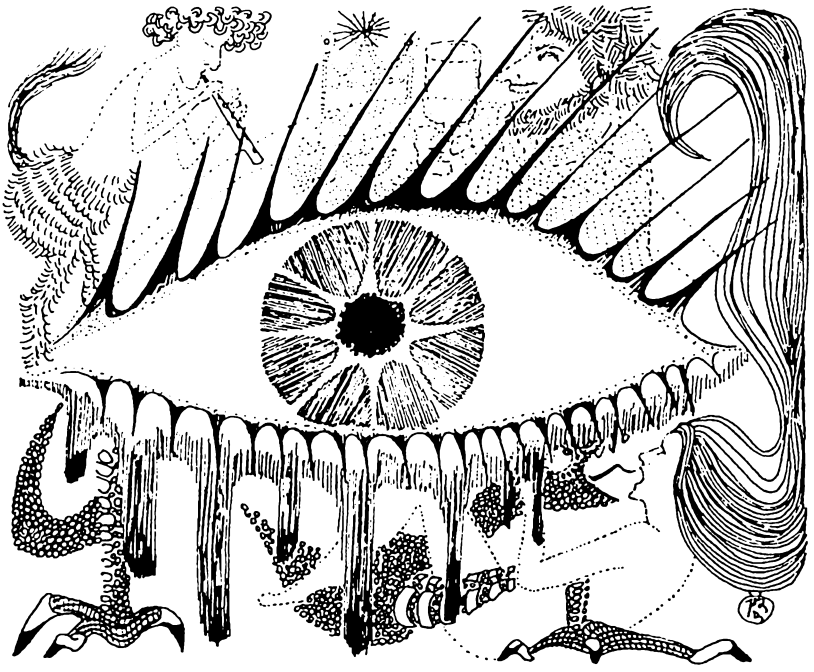
Weaver of melodies all golden-spun
The singer sings his song — and passes on.
The poet strums his lyre — then is one
With gray-hued dusk and rose of fading dawn.

A moment's laughter on the winds of Time,
A moment's ripple on Time's silent sea,
A golden riffle in the river's slime,
And then — the silence of Eternity.

Gray dust and ash where leaped the mystic fire,
Mingled with air and wind the once-red flame;
Breeze-born the tune, but now forgot the lyre —
Remains? — the musty thing that men call Fame.

Half-curious eyes that scan the yellowed page,
All heedless of the makers of the feast —
Why, Pierrot might have been a musty sage,
Francois Villon a stoled and sour priest.

Who penned this lyric? Who this sonnet? Whence
The soul on fire that snared these stars in song?
Who knows? Who cares? A vast indifference
Is all the answer of the marching throng.



Easter Island

How many weary centuries have flown
Since strange-eyed beings walked this ancient shore,
Hearing, as we, the green Pacific's roar,
Hewing fantastic gods from sullen stone!
The sands are bare; the idols stand alone.
Impotent 'gainst the years was all their lore:
They are forgot in ages dim and hoar;
Yet still, as then, the long tide-surges drone.

What dreams had they, that shaped these uncouth things?
Before these gods what victims bled and died?
What purple galleys swept along the strand
That bore the tribute of what dim sea-kings?
But now they reign o'er a forgotten land,
Gazing forever out beyond the tide.

Black Chant Imperial

Trumpets triumph in red disaster,
White skulls litter the broken sod,
And we who ride for the one Black Master
Howl at the iron gates of God.

Temples rock and the singers falter,
Lights go out in the rushing gloom —
Slay the priest on this blackened altar,
Rip the babe from the women's womb!

Black be the night that locks around them,
They who chant of the Good and Light,
Black be the pinions that shall confound them,
Breaking their brains with a deadly fright.

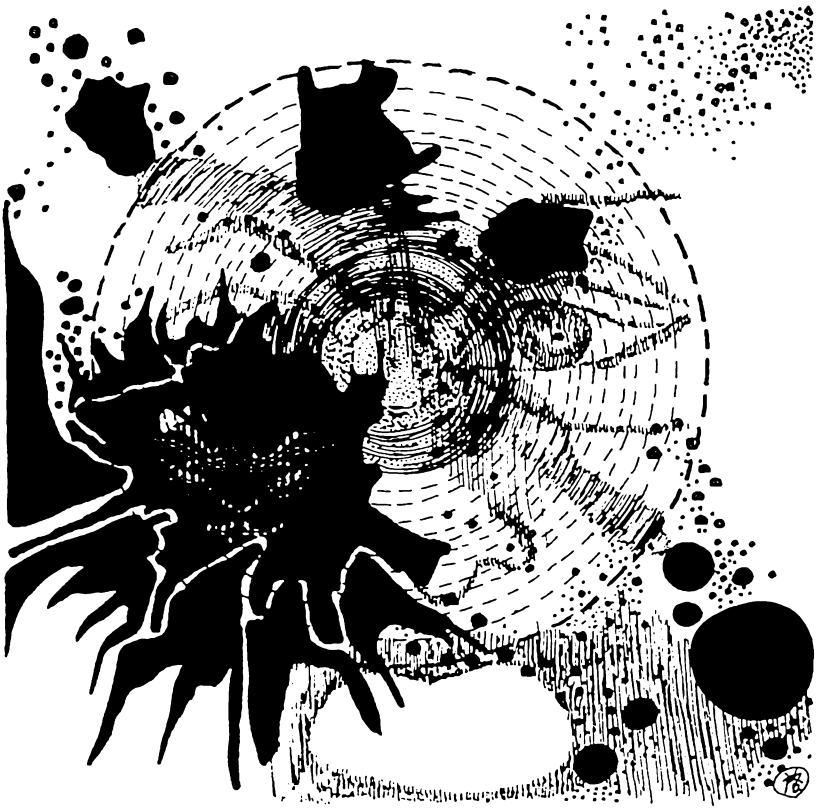
Praised be the Prince that rules forever
Throned in the shadows stark and grim,
Where cypress moans by the midnight river —
Lift your goblets and drink to him!

Virgins wail and a babe is whining
Nailed like a fly on a gory lance;
White on the skulls the stars are shining,
Over them sweeps our demon's dance.

Trumpets bray and the stars are riven!
Shatter the altar, blot the light!
From the bursting hells to the fallen heaven
We are kings of the world tonight!

An Open Window

Behind the Veil what gulfs of Time and Space?
What blinking mowing Shapes to blast the sight?
I shrink before a vague colossal Face
Born in the mad immensities of Night.



Lines Written in the Realization That I Must Die

The Black Door gapes and the Black Wall rises;
Twilight gasps in the grip of Night.
Paper and dust are the gems man prizes —
Torches toss in my waning sight.

Drums of glory are lost in the ages,
Bare feet fail on a broken trail —
Let my name fade from the printed pages;
Dreams and visions are growing pale.
Twilight gathers and none can save me.
Well and well, for I would not stay:

Let me speak through the stone you gave me:
He never could say what he wished to say.
Why should I shrink from the sign of leaving?
My brain is wrapped in a darkened cloud;
Now in the Night are the sisters weaving
For me a shroud.

Towers shake and the stars reel under,
Skulls are heaped in the Devil's fane;
My feet are wrapped in a rolling thunder,
Jets of agony lance my brain.

What of the world I leave forever?
Phantom forms in a fading sight —
Carry me out on the ebon river
Into the Night.

The Gates of Nineveh

These are the gates of Nineveh; here
Sargon came when his wars were won,
Gazed at the turrets looming clear,
Boldly etched in the morning sun.

Down from his chariot Sargon came,
Tossed his helmet upon the sand,
Dropped his sword with its blade like flame,
Stroked his beard with his empty hand.

"Towers are flaunting their banners red,
The people greet me with song and mirth,
But a weird is on me," Sargon said,
"And I see the end of the tribes of earth."

"Cities crumble, and chariots rust —
I see through a fog that is strange and gray —
All kingly things fade back to the dust,
Even the gates of Nineveh."

The Hills of Kandahar

The night primeval breaks in scarlet mist;
The shadows gray, and pales each silent star,
The eastern sky that rose-lipped dawn has kissed
Glows crimson o'er the hills of Kandahar.
A trumpet song re-echoes from afar;
Across the crags the golden glory grows
To drive the shades, renewing ancient war;
Now bursts full bloom the gorgeous morning rose.

These are the hills that many a sultan trod;
Their rocks have known full many a victor's stride;
These peaks could tell their tale of human pride —
See where they rear, each like a somber god.
Aye, they have gazed since first the primal dawn
Fired with a wild, vague flame a bestial soul
Who rose and stood and saw his fallen spawn
With him, somehow, part of Creation's whole,
And made himself immortal with a goal
To be attained — this untaught simian faun.

Aye, but these peaks have known the human tread:
The ebb and flow of dim humanity,
The restless, surging, never-ceasing tide,
The swarming tribes that came unceasingly;
The lust of kings, the bloody war-dawn's red,
The races that arose and ruled — and died.
They will be brooding when mankind is gone;
The teeming tribes that scaled their barricades —
Dim hordes that waxed at dusk and waned at dawn —
Are but as snow that on their shoulders fades.

Which Will Scarcely Be Understood

Small poets sing of little, foolish things,
As more befitting to a shallow brain
That dreams not of the pre-Atlantean kings,
Nor launches on that dark uncharted Main
That holds grim islands and unholy tides,
Where many a black mysterious secret hides.

True rime concerns her not with bursting buds,
The chirping bird, the lifting of the rose —
Save ebon blooms that swell in ghastly woods,
And that grim, voiceless bird that ever broods
Where through black boughs a wind of horror blows.

Oh, little singers, what know you of those
Ungodly, slimy shapes that glide and crawl
Out of unreckoned gulfs when midnights fall,
To haunt the poet's slumbering, and close
Against his eyes thrust up their hissing head,
And mock him with their eyes so serpent-red?

Conceived and bred in blackened pits of hell,
The poems come that set the stars on fire;
Born of black maggots writhing in a shell
Men call a poet's skull — an iron bell
Filled up with burning mist and golden mire.

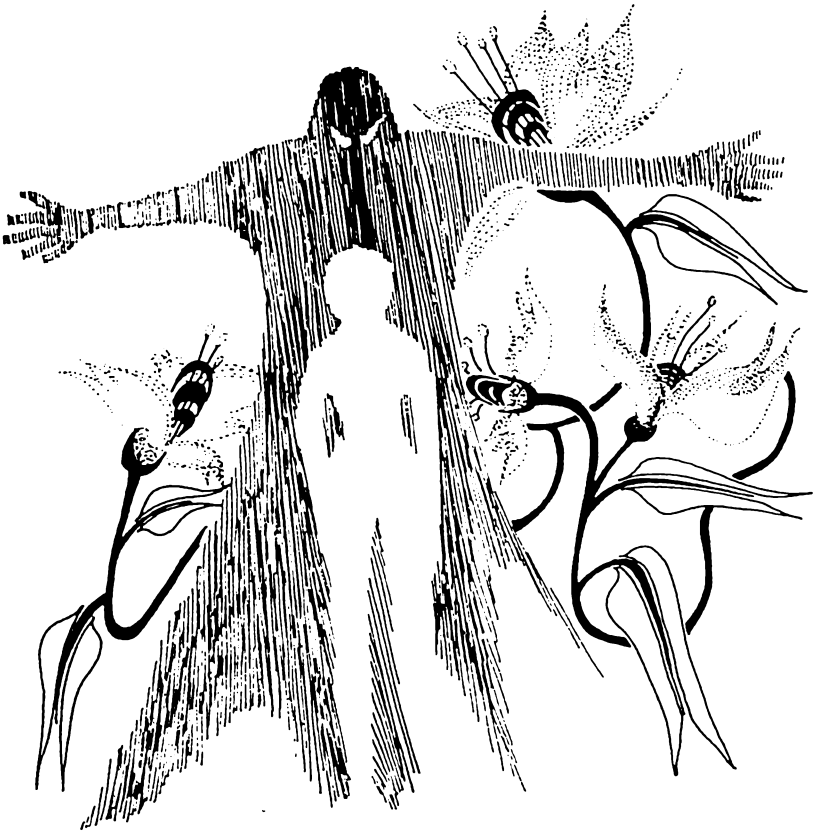
The royal purple is a moldy shroud;
The laurel crown is cypress fixed with thorns;
The sword of fame, a sickle notched and dull;
The face of beauty is a grinning skull;
And ever in their souls' red caverns loud
The rattle of the cloven hoofs and horns.

The poets know that justice is a lie,
That good and light are baubles filled with dust —
This world's slave-market where swine sell and buy,
This shambles where the howling cattle die,
Has blinded not their eyes with lies and lust.

Ring up the demons from the lower Pit,
Since Evil conquers goodness in the end;
Break down the Door and let the fires be lit,
And greet each slavering monster as a friend.

Let obscene shapes of Darkness ride the earth,
Let sacrificial smokes blot out the skies,
Let dying virgins glut the Black Gods' eyes,
And all the world resound with noisome mirth.

Break down the altars, let the streets run red,
Tramp down the race into the crawling slime;
Then where red Chaos lifts her serpent head,
The Fiend be praised, we'll pen the perfect rime.



"Sonnets out of Bedlam"

The Soul-Eater

I swam below the surface of a lake
And found myself within a curious hall,
Lined with bronze columns, somber-black and tall;
On them I heard the evil gray waves break.
Sudden the granite floor began to shake;
A monster strode from out an iron stall;
Before his gryphon feet I reeled, to fall
As one who, dreaming, struggles to awake.

Upon my lips he set his grisly mouth
As to allay some fierce, demoniac drouth.
A broken shell, I tread the earth in vain;
My comrades are the goblin and the troll,
Since One in that forgotten, sunken fane
In evil hunger sucked from me my soul.

The Dream and the Shadow

I dreamed a stony idol striding came
Out of the shadows of a brooding land,
And drew me, with unspoken, grim command
Into the dark. He named a monstrous Name.
And when I shrank with more than earthly shame,
He raised me high, gripped in his granite hand,
And crushed me — then to stain the silver sand,
My blood dripped down in jets of crimson flame.

I woke, and cold with horror of this dream,
Rose in my bed, crossed white with moonlight's bars.
Sudden a monstrous shadow seemed to loom
Above my bed; I lay and could not scream.
Across the sky a shadow passed like doom,
And for an instant, blotted out the stars.

The Last Hour

Hinged in the brooding west a black sun hung,
And Titan shadows barred the dying world.
The blind black oceans groped; their tendrils curled
And writhed and fell in feathered spray, and clung,
Climbing the granite ladders, rung by rung,
Which held them from the tribes whose death-cries skirled.
Above, unholy fires red wings unfurled —
Gray ashes floated down from where they swung.

A demon crouched, chin propped on brutish fist,
Gripping a crystal ball between his knees;
His skull-mouth gaped, and icy shone his eye.
Down crashed the crystal globe — beneath the seas
The dark lands sank — Gone in a fire-shot mist.
A painted sun hung in a starless sky.

Haunting Columns

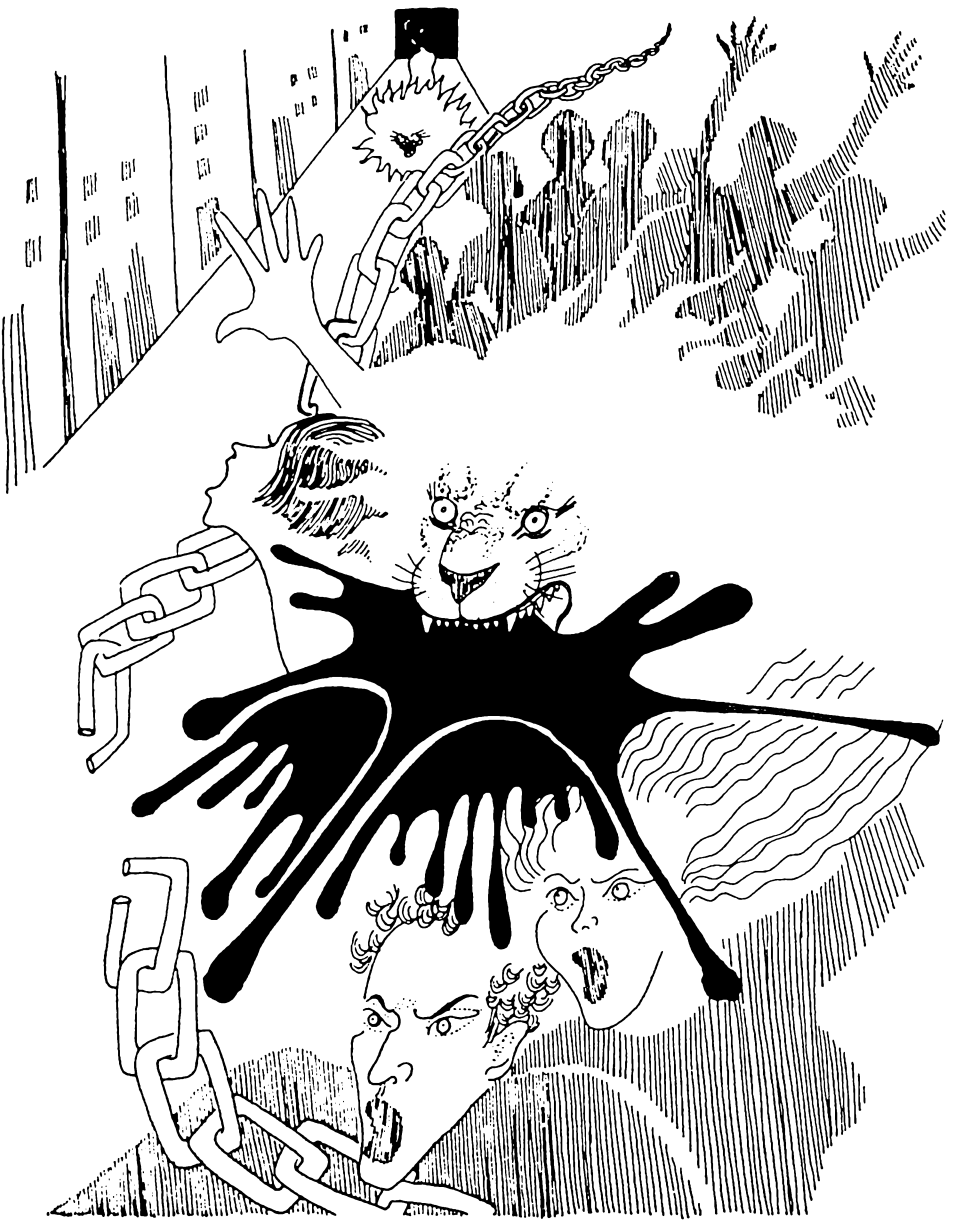
The walls of Luxor broke the silver sand
When stars were golden lepers in the night,
And, granite monsters in the pallid light,
They lurched like drunken Titans through the land,
With giant strides, most terrible and grand.
They ringed me when the slender moon was bright,
And gazing up their cold, inhuman height,
I shrieked and writhed and beat them with my hand.

Then dawn spread far her amaranthine gleam,
And I could feel my brain to opal turn
That on the iron hinges of the dream
Shattered to glowing shards that freeze and burn.
God grant my bones lie silver on the plain
Ere yet the walls of Luxor come again.

The Singer in the Mist

At birth a witch laid on me monstrous spells,
And I have trod strange highroads all my days,
Turning my feet to gray, unholy ways.
I grope for stems of broken asphodels;
High on the rims of bare, fiend-haunted fells,
I follow cloven tracks that lie ablaze,
And ghosts have led me through the moonlight's haze
To talk with demons in their granite hells.

Seas crash upon long dragon-guarded shores,
Bursting in crimson moons of burning spray,
And iron castles ope to me their doors,
And serpent-women lure with harp and lay.
The misty waves shake now to phantom oars—
Seek not for me, I sail to meet the day.



Verse from the stories.....

from THE SCARLET CITADEL

They trapped the Lion on Shamu's plain;
They weighted his limbs with an iron chain;
They cried aloud in the trumpet-blast,
They cried, "The Lion is caged at last!"
Woe to the cities of river and plain
If ever the Lion stalks again.

—Old Ballad

Gleaming shell of an outworn lie; fable of right divine —
You gained your crowns by heritage, but Blood was the price of mine.
The throne that I won by blood and sweat, by Crom, I will not sell
For promise of valleys filled with gold, or threat of the Halls of Hell!

—The Road of Kings

The Lion strode through the halls of Hell;
Across his path grim shadows fell
Of many a mowing, nameless shape—
Monsters with dripping jaws agape.
The darkness shuddered with scream and yell
When the Lion stalked through the halls of Hell.

—Old Ballad

A long bow and a strong bow, and let the skies grow dark!
The cord to the nock, the shaft to the ear, and the king of Koth for a mark!

—Song of the Bossonian Archers

from THE POOL OF THE BLACK ONE

Into the west, unknown of man,
Ships have sailed since the world began.
Read, if you dare, what Skelos wrote,
With dead hands fumbling his silken coat;
And follow the ships through the wind-blown wrack —
Follow the ships that come not back.

from KINGS OF THE NIGHT

The Caesar lolled on his ivory throne —
His iron legions came
To break a king in a land unknown,
And a race without a name.

—The Song of Bran

from RED BLADES OF BLACK CATHAY

Trumpets die in the loud parade,
The gray mist drinks the spears;
Banners of glory sink and fade
In the dust of a thousand years.
Singers of pride the silence stills,
The ghost of empire goes,
But a song still lives in the ancient hills,
And the scent of a vanished rose.
Ride with us on a dim, lost road
To the dawn of a distant day,
When swords were bare for a guerdon rare —
The Flower of Black Cathay.

from THE PHOENIX ON THE SWORD

When I was a fighting man, the kettle drums they beat;
The people scattered gold dust before my horse's feet;
But now I am a great king, the people hound my track
With poison in my wine cup, and daggers at my back.

—The Road of Kings

Under the caverned pyramids great Set coils asleep;
Among the shadows of the tombs his dusky people creep.
I speak the Word from the hidden gulfs that never knew the sun —
Send me a servant from my hate, oh scaled and shining One!

When the world was young and men were weak, and the fiends of the night walked free,
I strove with Set by fire and steel and the juice of the upas-tree;
Now that I sleep in the mount's black heart, and the ages take their toll,
Forget ye him who fought with the Snake to save the human soul?

What do I know of cultured ways, the gilt, the craft and the lie?
I, who was born in a naked land and bred in the open sky.
The subtle tongue, the sophist guile, they fail when the broadswords sing;
Rush in and die, dogs — I was a man before I was a king.

—The Road of Kings

from QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST

Believe green buds awaken in the spring,
That autumn paints the leaves with somber fire;
Believe I held my heart inviolate
To lavish on one man my hot desire.

—The Song of Belit

In that dead citadel of crumbling stone
Her eyes were snared by that unholy sheen,
And curious madness took me by the throat,
As of a rival lover thrust between.

—The Song of Belit

Was it a dream the nighted lotus brought?
Then curst the dream that bought my sluggish life;
And curst each laggard hour that does not see
Hot blood drip blackly from the crimsoned knife.

—The Song of Belit

The shadows were black around him,
The dripping jaws gaped wide,
Thicker than rain the red drops fell;
But my love was fiercer than Death's black spell,
Nor all the iron walls of hell
Could keep me from his side,.

—The Song of Belit

Now we are done with roaming, evermore;
No more the oars, the windy harp's refrain;
Nor crimson pennon frights the dusky shore;
Blue girdle of the world, receive again
Her whom thou gavest me.

—The Song of Belit

Other Poems

Always Comes Evening

Riding down the road at evening with the stars for steed and shoon
I have heard an old man singing underneath a copper moon;
"God, who gemmed with topaz twilights, opal portals of the day,
"On your amaranthine mountains, why make human souls of clay?

"For I rode the moon-mare's horses in the glory of my youth,
"Wrestled with the hills at sunset — till I met brass-tinctured Truth.
"Till I saw the temples topple, till I saw the idols reel,
"Till my brain had turned to iron, and my heart had turned to steel.

"Satan, Satan, brother Satan, fill my soul with frozen fire;
"Feed with hearts of rose-white women ashes of my dead desire.
"For my road runs out in thistles and my dreams have turned to dust.
"And my pinions fade and falter to the raven-wings of rust.

"Truth has smitten me with arrows and her hand is in my hair —
"Youth, she hides in yonder mountains — go and seek her, if you dare!
"Work your magic, brother Satan, fill my brain with fiery spells.
"Satan, Satan, brother Satan, I have known your fiercest Hells."

Riding down the road at evening when the wind was on the sea,
I have heard an old man singing, and he sang most drearily
Strange to hear, when dark lakes shimmer to the wailing of the loon,
Amethystine Homer singing under evening's copper moon.

Emancipation

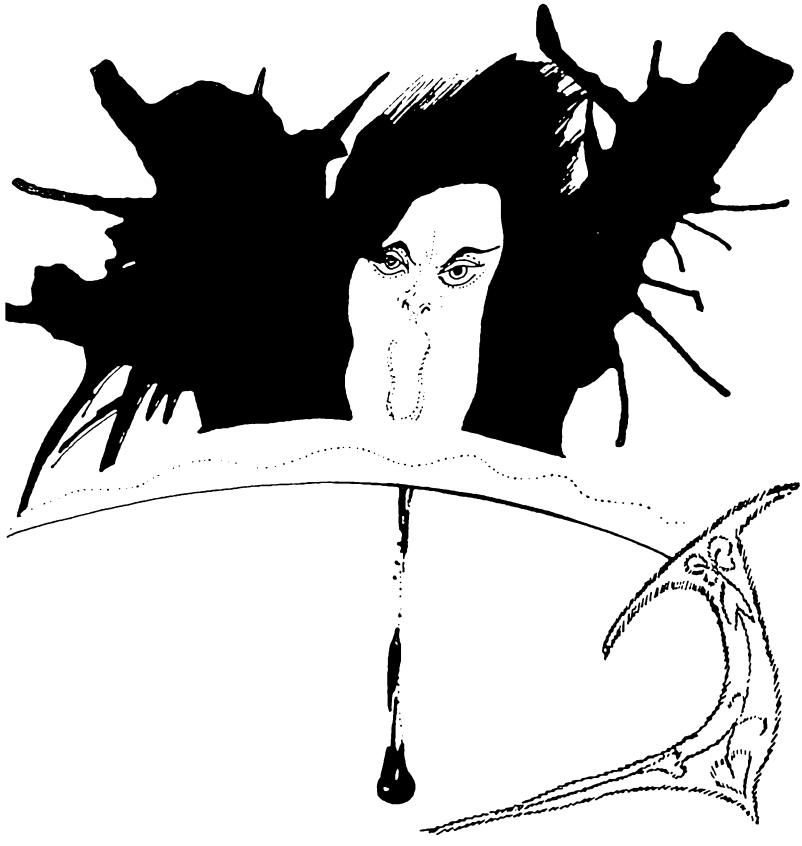
The couplers lock and the air-brakes grate —
And I'm headed West on a Red Ball freight.
The rain can fall and the wind can moan,
For I chucked the grind, and I'm on my own.

No more figures to check and add,
Till my eyes go blind and my brain goes mad.
No more bosses to hem and say:
"We have been forced to reduce your pay.
"Just be thankful you've got the job."
No more cringing to some fat slob
Who holds my fate in his grubby hand —
I'm marked no more with the wage-slave's brand!

What do I care if my shoes are thin
And the holes in my clothes let the rain soak in?
I've served my time and I'm overdue,
Just a poor sap who used to stew
With the other poor worms that buy and sell;
But I've told the boss he can go to Hell.
I've left him singing his hymn of Hate —
And I'm headed West on a Red Ball freight!

Invective

There burns in me no honeyed drop of love,
Nor soft compassion for my brother man;
I would indeed humanity possessed
A single throat a keen-edged knife could span.



Hymn of Hatred

Oh, brother coiling in the acrid grass,
Lift not for me your sibilant refrain:
Less deadly venom slavers from your fangs
Than courses fiercely in my every vein.

A single victim satisfied your hate,
But I would see walled cities crash and reel,
Gray-bearded sages blown from cannon-mouths,
And infants spitted on the reddened steel.

And I would see the stars come thundering down,
The foaming oceans break their brimming bowl —
Oh, universal ruin would not serve
To glut the fury of my maddened soul!

Prince and Beggar

I was a prince of China, lord of a million spears;
You were a soak in Brooklyn, shining the bar for beers.
I lolled on a throne of sapphire, you loafed in a dance-hall door;
My love was a Manchu princess, yours was a Harlem whore.

I slumbered on velvet couches, lulled by a fountain's tune;
You snored on a broken camp cot in the back of Mike Shane's saloon.
My friends were lords of the Indies, rulers of lands immense;
Your pals were the tout and the con man, the dip, the yegg and the fence.

I gambled with lands and armies, castles and crowns and thrones;
You risked your jack in the crap games and beefed when you dropped
three bones.
I died 'neath the spears of the Tartars on a wild war-trampled ridge;
You went on a bum one evening and fell off the Brooklyn Bridge.

Yet down through the sweeping ages the ego's tendrils twine,
Linking the prince to the beggar and the lordling to the swine.
And body is linked to body, though strange it is to say
That the I of some dim tomorrow is the I of yesterday.
But the soul wears many garments as is written in the stars,
And I that was prince of China, was the soak of the Brooklyn bars.

The Tempter

Something tapped me on the shoulder
Something whispered, "Come with me.
"Leave the world of men behind you,
"Come where care may never find you,
"Come and follow, let me bind you
"Where, in that dark, silent sea,
"Tempest of the world n'er rages;
"There to dream away the ages,
"Heedless of Time's turning pages,
"Only, come with me."

"Who are you?" I asked the phantom,
"I am Rest from Hate and Pride.
"I am friend to king and beggar,
"I am Alpha and Omega,
"I was councillor to Hagar
"But men call me Suicide."
I was weary of tide breasting,
Weary of the world's behesting,
And I lusted for the resting
As a lover for his bride.

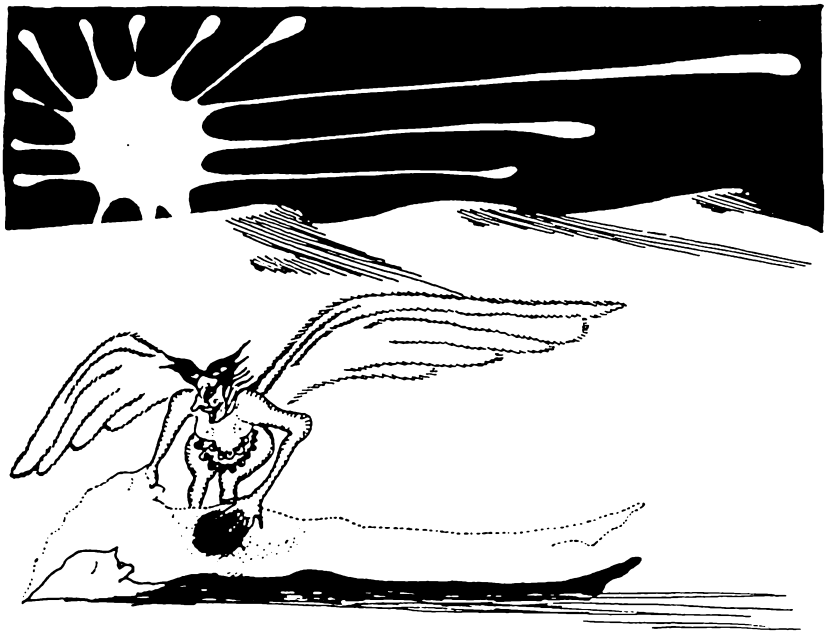
And my soul tugged at its moorings
And it whispered, "Set me free.
"I am weary of this battle,
"Of this world of human cattle,
"All this dreary noise and prattle.
"This you owe to me."

Long I sat and long I pondered,
On the life that I had squandered,
O'er the paths that I had wandered
Never free.

In a shadow panorama
Passed life's struggles and its fray.
And my soul tugged with new vigor,
Huger grew the phantom's figure,
As I slowly pressed the trigger,
Saw the world fade swift away.
Through the fogs old Time came striding,
Radiant clouds were 'bout me riding,
As my soul went gliding, gliding,
From the shadow into day.

The Road of Azrael

Towers reel as they burst asunder,
Streets run red in the butchered town;
Standards fall and the lines go under,
And the iron horsemen ride me down.
Out of the strangling dusts that blind me
Let me ride for my hour is nigh,
From the walls that stifle, the hoofs that grind me,
To the sun and the desert wind to die.



A Song of the Don Cossacks

Wolf-brother, wolf-lover,
Over the river the kites hover
Where witch-light glimmers
And tall grass shimmers —
What dead things shall their eyes discover?
What, when the sabers sing in the gloaming,
What, when the gray wolves cease their roaming?
Wolf-lover, wolf-brother,
We are sworn to slay each other.

Gray light glances
Along our lances —
Both of us sons of our Volga mother.
Kites shall feast when ranks burst asunder
And the roar of the red tide hurls us under.
When the white steel glints and the red blood spurts —
Death in the camps and death in the yurts.
When the crimson shadows of twilight fall
We shall be feasts for the white jackal.
Wolf-lover, wolf-brother,
We be sons of the self-same mother,
Though between us flows a red-stained tide.
Horse and man
Ride we far,
You for the Kahn,
I for the Czar,
Wolf-lover, Tartar-brother, ride!

To A Woman

Though fathoms deep you sink me in the mould,
Locked in with thick-lapped lead and bolted wood,
Yet rest not easy in your lover's arms;
Let him beware to stand where I have stood.

I shall not fail to burst my ebon case,
And thrust aside the clods with hands stained red.
Your blood shall turn to ice to see my face
Look from the shadows on your midnight bed.

To face the dead, he, too, will wake in vain,
My fingers at his throat, your scream his knell;
He will not see me tear you from your bed,
And drag you by your golden hair to Hell.

Retribution

The moon above the Kerry hills had risen scarce a span
When we went forth from Knocknaroe to card a Saxon man.
We stretched him naked on the ditch — God save this soul of mine!
The howls of him as hard we dragged the cats along his spine.

A great, full-bodied man he was, that beat poor Tom O'Rourke,
The hardest English landlord now, from Donegal to Cork.
'Twas, "Damn your eyes! Pay rent or starve! Get out with all your brats!"
But, faith, the howling of him now was louder than the cats.

It's maybe he remembered then, the swelling Saxon toad,
How he evicted Biddy Flynn to die beside the road.
I hope that he remembered, too, the while the tomcats clung,
My cousin Mike O'Flaherty his testimony hung.

He cursed the king in agony and damned the penal laws —
Oh, quite a different man he was beneath those ripping claws.
His squealing dwindled to a moan, his back was bloody beef;
We flung him in the thorny ditch like any common thief.

The mist was stealing from the sea, the night was strange and still.
We heard him weeping like a child as we went down the hill.
And then, above our oaths and jests, there sounded from the wood
A cry so wild and sweet and sad it chained us where we stood.
Some nightbird rended by an owl — I felt black sorrow rise;
I turned to speak to Dermod Shea, and tears were in his eyes.

Solomon Kane's Homecoming

The white gulls wheeled above the cliffs, the air was slashed with foam,
The long tides moaned along the strand when Soloman Kane came home.
He walked in silence strange and dazed through the little Devon town,
His gaze, like a ghost's come back to life, roamed up the street and down.

The people followed wonderingly to mark his spectral stare,
And in the town silently they thronged about him there.
He heard as a man hears in a dream the worn old rafters creak,
And Solomon lifted his drinking-jack and spoke as a ghost might speak:

"There sat Sir Richard Grenville once; in smoke and flame he passed,
"And we were one to fifty-three, but we gave them blast for blast.
"From crimson dawn to crimson dawn, we held the Dons at bay.
"The dead lay littered on our decks, our masts were shot away.

"We beat them back with broken blades, till crimson ran the tide;
"Death thundered in the cannon smoke when Richard Grenville died.
"We should have blown her hull apart and sunk beneath the Main."
The people saw upon his wrists the scars of the racks of Spain.

"Where is Bess?" said Solomon Kane. "Woe that I caused her tears."
"In the quiet churchyard by the sea she has slept these seven years."
The sea-wind moaned at the window-pane, and Solomon bowed his head.
"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust, and the fairest fade," he said.

His eyes were mystical deep pools that drowned unearthly things,
And Solomon lifted his head and spoke of his wanderings.
"Mine eyes have looked on sorcery in the dark and naked lands,
"Horror born of the jungle gloom and death on the pathless sands.

"And I have known a deathless queen in a city old as Death,
"Where towering pyramids of skulls her glory witnesseth.
"Her kiss was like an adder's fang, with the sweetness Lilith had
"And her red-eyed vassals howled for blood in that City of the Mad.

"And I have slain a vampire shape that sucked a black king white,
"And I have roamed through grisly hills where dead men walked at night.
"And I have seen heads fall like fruit in the slaver's barracoon,
"And I have seen winged demons fly all naked in the moon.

"My feet are weary of wandering and age comes on apace;
I fain would dwell in Devon now, forever in my place."
The howling of the ocean pack came whistling down the gale,
And Solomon Kane threw up his head like a hound that snuffs the trail.

A-down the wind like a running pack the hounds of the ocean bayed,
And Solomon Kane rose up again and girt his Spanish blade.
In his strange cold eyes a vagrant gleam grew wayward and blind and bright,
And Solomon put the people by and went into the night.

A wild moon rode the wild white clouds, the waves in white crests flowed,
When Solomon Kane went forth again and no man knew his road.
They glimpsed him etched against the moon, where clouds on hilltop thinned;
They heard an eery echoed call that whistled down the wind.

Song at Midnight

I heard an old gibbet that crowned a bare hill
Creaking a song in the midnight chill;
And I shivered to hear that grisly refrain
That moaned in the night through the fog and the rain.

"Oh, where are the men who came to me
"And danced all night on the gallows tree?
"Gallant and peasant, man and maid,
"Many have walked in that long parade.
"My chains are broken and red with rust,
"My wood is sealed with the moldy crust.
"Have men forgotten their debt to me,
"That they come no more to the gallows tree?"

The drear wind moaned for a dark refrain,
And a raven called in the drifting rain:
"Oh, where are the feasts that awaited me
"Long, long ago on the gibbet tree?"

A slow-worm spoke from the gallows foot:
"Death is spoils for a crow to loot.
"The winds and the rain they worked their will
"The kites and the ravens have had their fill,
"But last of all when the chains broke free,
"The fruit of the gallows came to me.
"Men and their works, so swiftly past,
"Come to a feast for the worms at last.
"Here I have gnawed on this marrow good,
"Where now I gnaw on this crumbling wood.
"For men and their works are a feast for me —
"The bones, and the noose, and the gallows tree."

One Who Comes At Eventide

I think when I am old a furtive shape
Will sit beside me at my fireless hearth,
Dabbled with blood from stumps of severed wrists,
And flecked with blackened bits of mouldy earth.

My blood ran fire when the deed was done;
Now it runs colder than the moon that shone
On shattered fields where dead men lay in heaps
Who could not hear a ravished daughter's moan.

(Dim through the bloody dawn on bitter winds
The throbbing of the distant guns was brought
When I reeled like a drunkard from the hut
That hid the horror my red hands had wrought.)

So now I fire my veins with stinging wine,
And hoard my youth as misers hug their gold,
Because I know what shape will come and sit
Beside my crumbling hearth — when I am old.

Rune

Gods of heather, god of lake,
Bestial fiends of swamp and brake;
White god riding on the moon,
Jackal-jawed, with voice of loon;
Serpent god whose scaly coils
Grasp the Universe in toils;

See the Unseen Sages sit;
See the council fires alit.
See I stir the glowing coals,
Toss on manes of seven foals.
Seven foals all golden shod
From the herds of Alba's god.

Now in numbers one and six,
Shape and place the magic sticks,
Scented wood brought from afar,
From the land of Morning Star.
Hewn from limbs of sandal-trees,
Brought far o'er the Eastern Seas.

Sea-snake fangs, see now I fling,
Pinions of a sea-gull's wing.
Now the magic dust I toss,
Men are shadows, life is dross.
Now the flames crawl, ere they blaze,
Now the smokes rise in a haze.

Fanned by far off ocean blast
Leaps the tale of distant past.
Dimly, dimly, glimmers the starlight,
Over the heather-hill, over the vale.
Gods of the Old Land brood o'er the far night,
Things of the darkness ride on the gale.

Now while the fire smolders, while smoke enfolds it,
Now ere it leaps in clear, mystic flame,
Harken once more (else the dark gods withold it)
Hark to the tale of the race without a name.

Men of the Shadows

From the dim red dawn of Creation,
From the fogs of timeless time
Came we, the first great nation,
First on the upward climb.

Savage, untaught, unknowing,
Groping through primitive night,
Yet faintly catching the glowing,
The hint of the coming Light.

Ranging the lands untraveled,
Building our land-marks of stone.
Vaguely grasping at glory,
Gazing beyond our ken
Mutely the ages' story
Rearing on plain and fen.

See, how the Lost Fire smolders,
We are one with the eons' must.
Nations have trod on our shoulders,
Trampling us into the dust.

We, the first of the races,
Linking the Old and the New —
Look, where the sea-cloud spaces
Mingle with ocean-blue.

So we have mingled with ages,
And the world-wind our ashes stirs,
Vanished are we from Time's pages,
Our Memory? Wind in the firs.

Stonehenge of long-gone glory,
Sombre and lone in the night,
Murmur the age-old story
How we kindled the first of the light.

Speak, night-winds, of man's creation,
Whisper o'er crag and fen,
The tale of the first great nation,
The last of the Stone Age men.

Song of the Pict

Wolf on the height
Mocking the night;
Slow comes the light
Of a nation's new dawn.
Shadow hordes massed
Out of the past.
Fame that shall last
Strides on and on.
Over the vale
Thunders the gale
Bearing the tale
Of a nation up-lifted.
Flee, wolf and kite!
Fame that is bright.

Chant of the White Beard

O'er lake agleam the old gods dream;
Ghosts stride the heather dim.
The night winds croon; the eery moon
Slips o'er the ocean's rim.
From peak to peak the witches shriek,
The gray wolf seeks the height.
Like gold sword sheath, far o'er the heath
Glimmers the wandering light.

Nisapur

The day that towers, sapphire kissed,
Reeled to a Mongol sword that hissed,
And broke the silver sighing mist
That parted doom from Nisapur.

Or when in morning shadows grey
The flying ghosts of Subotai
Came galloping from far Cathay
To trample towers of Nisapur.

Or when in midnight's star-shah'd rule
There came o'er sands like golden pools,
Bayezid riding from Stamboul
To break the walls of Nisapur.

Ere Rustum, great fire-breathing lord
Who broke the genii with his sword,
Had fallen before the Golden Horde —
His bones are dust in Nisapur.

And he who chanted of the vine,
Spilt like a skin of Shiraz wine,
Had made that dust a thing divine —
Divine the dust of Nisapur.

Babylon

For I have seen the lizards crawl
Through high Belshazzar's marble halls
When ghostly shadow petals fall
In Babylon, dead Babylon.

And many a golden girdled spire
Like molten moonlight veined with fire,
That fell before the ages' ire
In Babylon, far Babylon.

Have watched the star-dark, misty shades
Come down the lonely colonnades
When the grey rose of twilight fades
In Babylon, in Babylon.

Lost since the dust dead distant noon
When Rustum heard the trumpet tune
And Tamerlane broke down the moon
And ringed the walls of Babylon.

Niflheim

Grim land of death, what monstrous visions lurk
Amid the icy fastness of your hills?
Your crags are hoary and they never melt;
Their blades of ice are deep in Midgard's heart.

They knew uncanny dawns before that time
When in the greyness of a sunless void,
Audhumla burst the sullen frost and saw
The strange-eyed Buri looming into life.

Oh, sombre land that I know ye are!
The seat of Midgard's mysteries are you,
For you are Ymir's cold, inhuman heart
Which feeds all oceans with his sluggish blood.

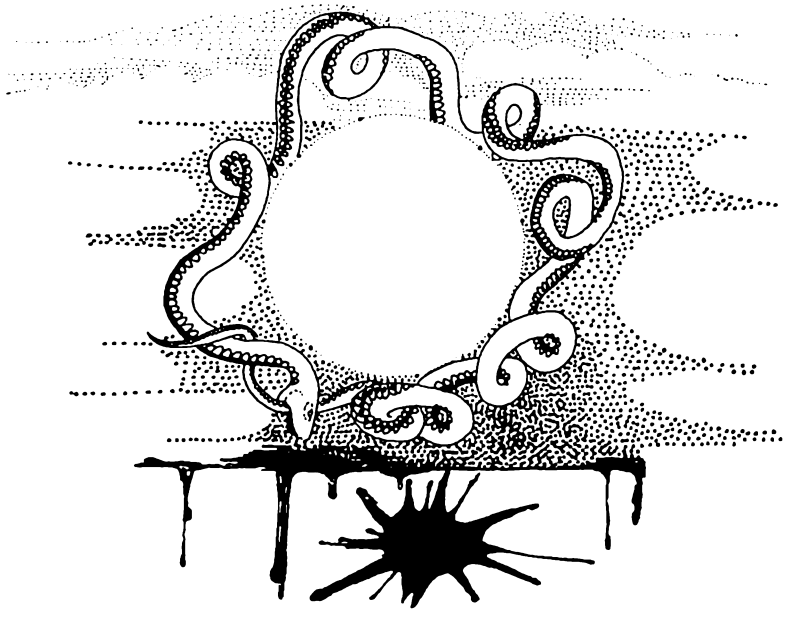
The sky is rimed with frost — the crusted sun
Rocks down the blue, a shield of frozen flame.
Gigantic shadows rise and loom and live
And burst the links that chain them to the past.

They swirl like grey-limbed giants in the night.
They stalk amid the cold and mocking stars.
Ho! Giant brood of shadows! Find in me
A brother and a master and a slave.

Together we will burst the brains of men
With darksome wisdom from abysmal heights,
With knowledge that the soul cannot withstand.
Aye, I have watched you, reeling o'er the ice,
When mist-grey monsters swirled along the sky
And through my gibbering laughter stabbed the sleet.

Sound out the war-horn's doom for Ragnarok!
Let man's destroyers roar from Jotunnheimr
To rend the world and hurl the oceans down
Till in high Asgard wake the sleeping gods.

Then in the crashing combat of that day,
Let Midgard rise and roar and Ymir wake.
Till bergs of ice roar down to Muspellheim
And all becomes as thou art, Niflheim.



The Gods of Easter Island

Long ere Priapus pranced through groves Arcadian sunlight kissed
The gods of Easter Island were born out of the mist.
Before the Elder deities from Egypt's fogs were born
The gods of Easter Island stood up to greet the morn.
Before Mylitta knew the light or ever Bel had birth
The gods of Easter Island were rulers of the earth.
Before the bulls of Nineveh were hewn out of their stone
The gods of Easter Island stood silent and alone.

The gods of Easter Island saw kingdoms come and go
And shrines and idols shattered as tides that ebb and flow.
They saw the kite-winged Horus sweep down the beach to drink.
They saw Atlantis topple and Lemuria sink.
They brood through Topaz eventide when tropic day is done;
I see them o'er the ocean, black in the dying sun.

The Heart of the Sea's Desire

The stars beat up from the shadowy sea,
The caves of the coral and pearl,
And the night is afire with a red desire
For the loins of a golden girl.

You have left your girdle upon the beach
And you wade from the pulsing land,
And the hot tide darts to your secret parts
That have known one lover's hand.

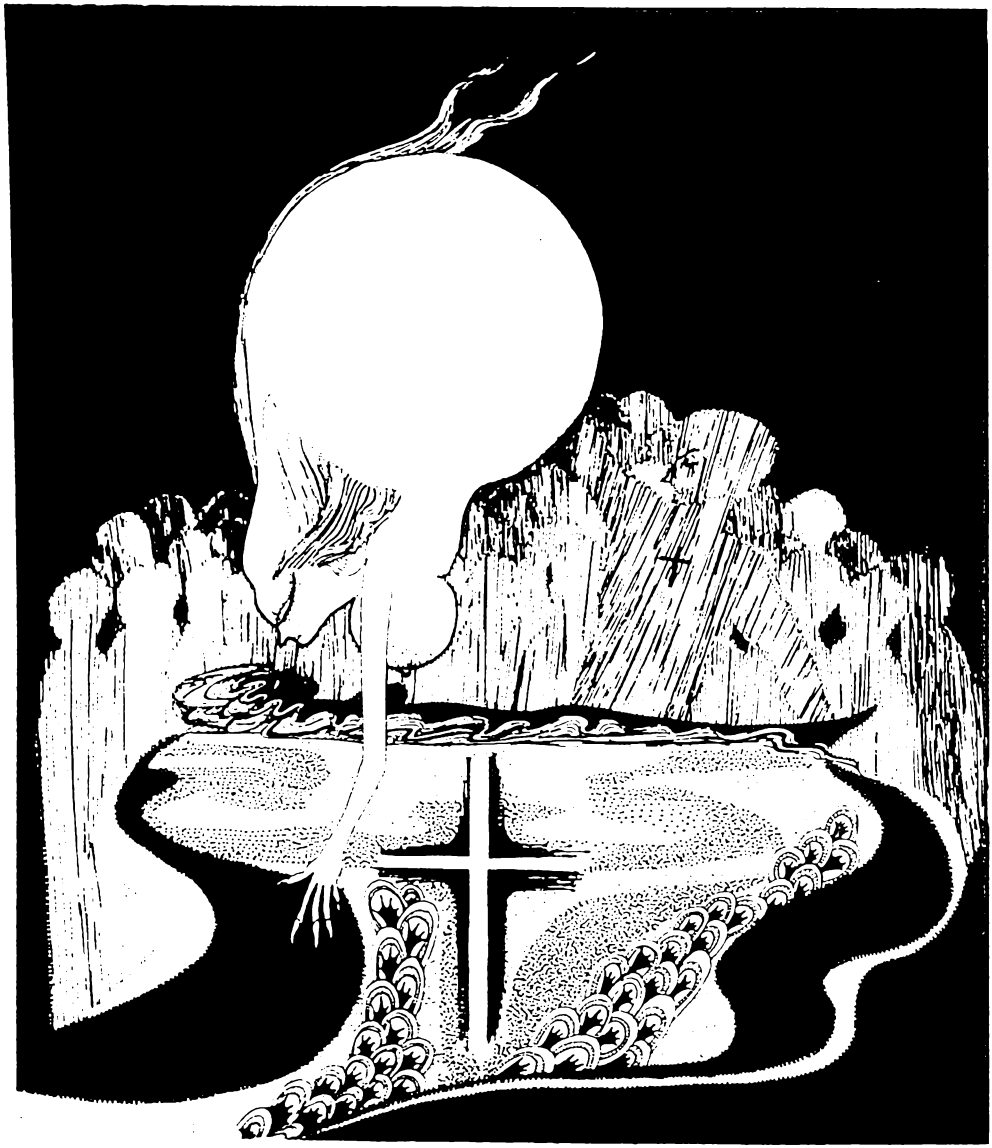
The hot tide laves your rounded limbs,
That his subtle fingers part,
And the sea that lies between your thighs
Is the heart of the Night's red heart.

In the days to come and the nights to come,
And the days and the nights to be,
A babe you shall hold to your breast of gold
As you croon a lullaby;

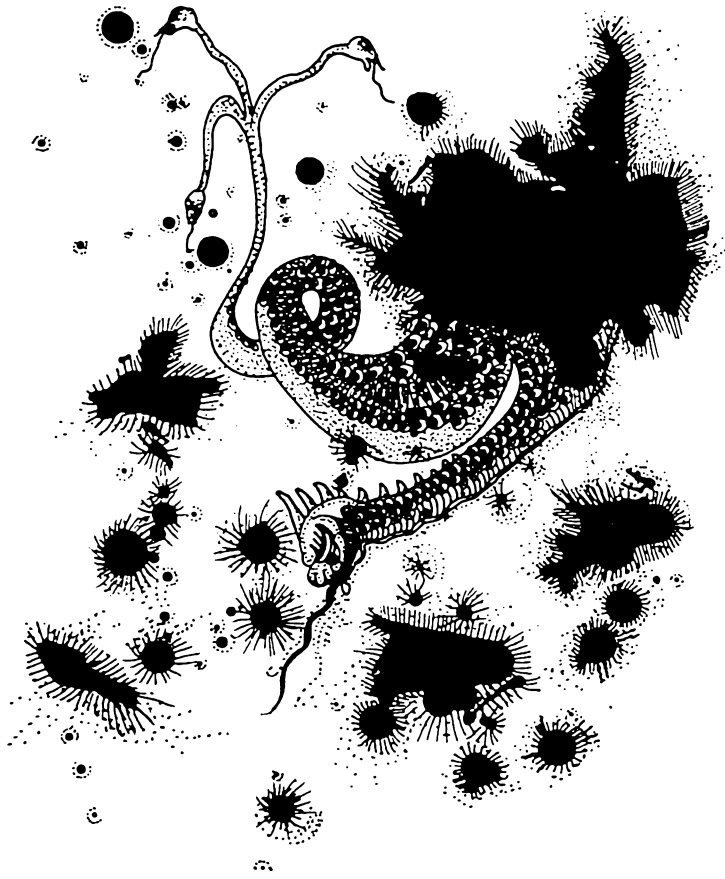
A babe with the cry of a wind-racked gull,
That shall grow to a round limbed girl
With strange cold eyes like the sea that lies
In the caves of coral and pearl.

Her soul shall be as an ocean wind,
Restless her feet shall be,
And she shall be part of the Night's red heart
And the heart of the sounding sea.

And the man who lies by your side at night,
He is not your daughter's sire;
For she is the babe of a hungry Night
And the heart of the sea's desire.



"Voices of the Night"



The Voices Waken Memory

The blind black shadows reach inhuman arms
To draw me into darkness once again;
The brooding night wind hints of nameless harms,
And down the shadowed hill a vague refrain
Bears half-remembered ghosts to haunt my soul,
Like far-off neighing of the nightmare's foal.

But let me fix my phantom-shadowed eyes
Hard on the stars — pale points of silver light —
Here is the borderland — here reason lies —
There, vision, gryphons, Nothing, and the Night.
Down, down, red specters, down, and rack me not!
Out, wolves of hell! Oh God, my pulses thrum;
The night grows fierce and blind and red and hot,
And nearer still a grim insistent drum.

I will not look into the shadows — No!
The stars shall grip and hold my frantic gaze —
But even in the stars black visions grow,
And dragons writhe with iron eyes ablaze.
Oh Gods that raised my blindness with your curse,
And let me see the horrid shapes behind
All outward veils that cloak the universe,
The loathsome demon-spells that bind and blind,
Since even the stars are noisome, foul and fell,
Let me glut deep with memory dreams of hell.

Moon Shame

The great black tower rose to split the stars,
In all the world below there was no light,
But other towers fringed the sky like spars
To mark that silent city of the night.

On one high altar nearest to the cold
Hard pallid moon that broke the velvet sky,
With waving plumes and mask of beaten gold
A grim nude figure stood — the priest was I.

The worshippers lay round in one dim ring
And on the altar's face that blackly shone
A naked woman, cold and white and prone,
Lay silent to my frightful whispering.

My low, grim chanting ceased — like men who sinned
The worshippers around us caught their breath
And through my plumes I heard the nightborn wind
Whisper a wordless monotone of death.

From hidden lutes there broke a grisly tune;
I reached an arm that plumbed the pulsing skies
And tore from out her place the frosty moon
And laid it 'tween those heavy naked thighs.

Then swift the change in fashion, form and shape;
I saw a faint mist shift and fade away —
And there a woman on a woman lay,
In shameful passion and unnatural rape.

Strange were her eyes, icy deep and icy cold
With passions human soul could never hold.
More cold and white than rarest ivory were
Her upturned, surging buttocks and her thighs,
And firm full breasts; her strange pale moonlight hair
Floated about her shoulders like a cloud.

No whisper broke the silence; still and cowed
The people cringed before her icy eyes.
Beneath her thighs the woman whimpered twice
Then hid her eyes before those eyes of ice.

Babel

Now in the gloom the pulsing drums repeat,
And all the night is filled with evil sound;
I hear the throbbing of inhuman feet
On marble stairs that silence locks around.

I see black temples loom against the night,
With tentacles like serpents writhed afar,
And waving in a dusky dragon light
Great moths whose wings unholy tapers char.
Red memory on memory, tier on tier,
Builds up a tower, time and space to span;
Through world on world I rise, and sphere on sphere,
To star-shot gulfs of lunacy and fear —
Black screaming ages never dreamed by man.

Was this your plan, foul spawn of cosmic mire,
To freeze my soul to stone and icy fire,
To carve me in the moon that all mankind
May know its race is futile, weak and blind —
A horror-blasted statue in the sky,
That does not live and nevermore can die?

Laughter in the Gulfs

Ten million years beyond the sweep of Time,
Ten million leagues from bound and measured Place,
I hear vast monsters in the cosmic slime
That mock the pallid glow of my dim face.

Here scum is quick and crawling filth alive
And nameless, shapeless horrors breed and crawl,
And serpent-things horrific writhe and thrive —
But through the nauseous muck I hear the Call —

There still are deeper Hells of Time to plumb,
Dark demon shapes more terrible and vast,
Unheard, unguessed, undreamed of, broods the drum,
That crouch along the sky-lines of the Past.

Great taloned fingers grope from out the Deeps
And fearful eyes are gleaming in the gloom.
Dismembered limbs that lie in moldering heaps
Start up and strive to drag me to my doom,
And I with laughter of a man insane,
Am wading through a cloud that is a Brain.

A Crown For A King

A roar of battle thundered in the hills;
All day our iron blades drank deep in blood.
Till lighted with the flame the sunset spills
We saw against our backs the river's flood.
Among its rocks the waters screamed and raced;
We had our choice, we who were rebel slaves,
To die beneath the horrors that we faced
Or die amid the horror of the waves.

Aye, we were men who lined the roaring merge
And spears and insults at our foemen hurled —
They were not men who gathered for the charge
But demons of a blood-black elder world.
But even risen slaves may have a king —
We had a king like some great iron tower,
And bloody now he faced the closing ring
And leaned on his red sword in that red hour.

The life blood trickled down his hairy chest;
His eyes were blazing suns of deathless hate;
He shook his hair back like a lion's crest
And staggered out, sword high, to meet his fate.
Aye, breast to breast that final charge we met
And blind with blood and slaughter, smote and slew;
Our broken swords were ghastly red and wet,
But still the bat-like pinions beat and flew.

And fearful talons dragged us to our doom
And fiendish eyes flamed fearful through the gloom.
Still in the west there burned a fading flame
When I rose reeling in a field of red,

And searching for our warrior king I came
And found him dead upon a heap of dead.
Demon and man, they silent lay and still
With cloven skull, rent heart and torn breast.

And now the moon was rising on the hill
And now the light was dying in the west.
And I alone of all that mighty horde
Still held to life; into a rough rude ring
I bent with waning strength a broken sword,
A diadem to gem a warrior king.
And on his red brow set that bloody crown,
Then Life gave up the ghost as night came down.

ALWAYS COMES EVENING by Robert E. Howard

Compiled by Glenn Lord
Illustrated by Keiko Nelson

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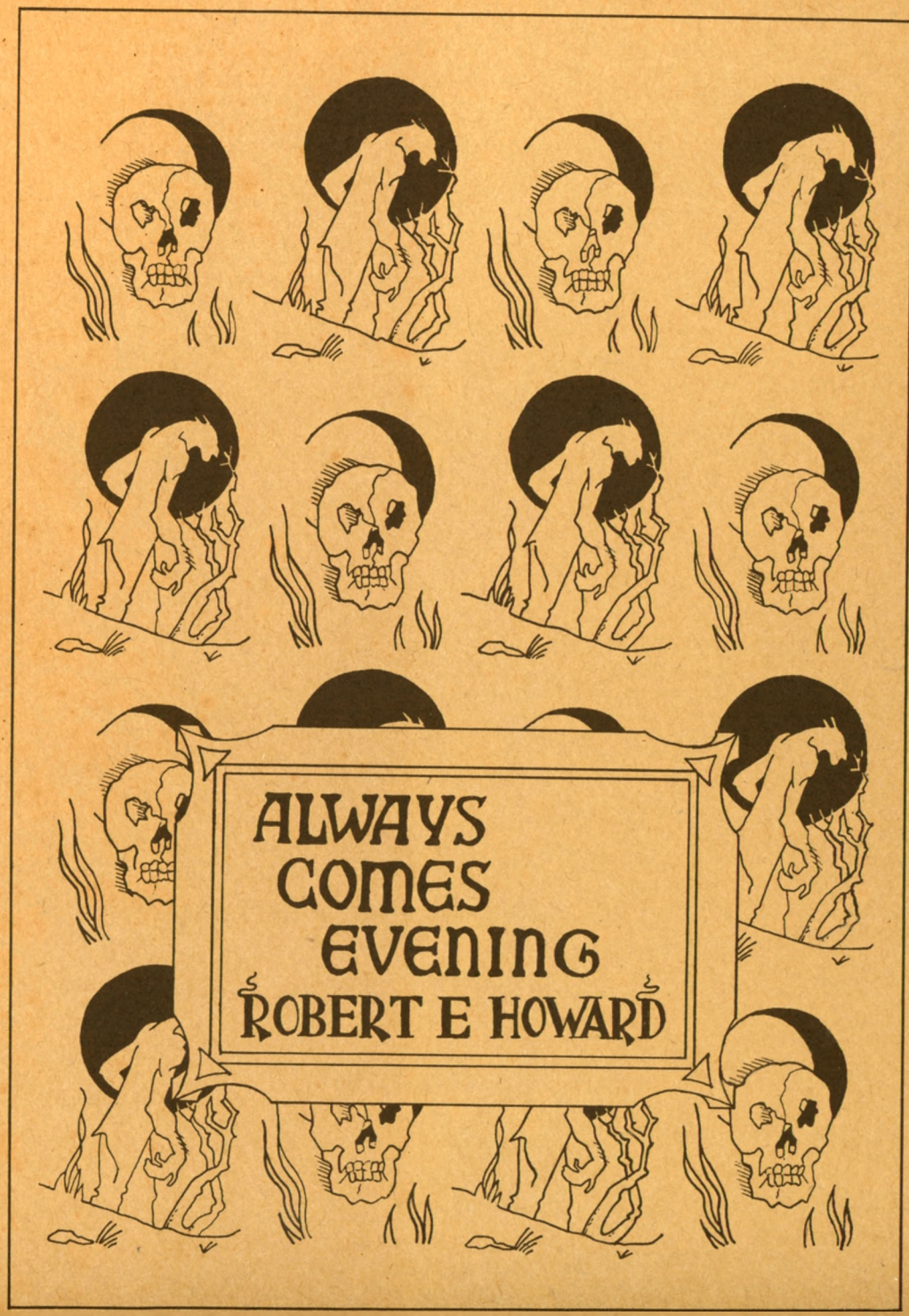
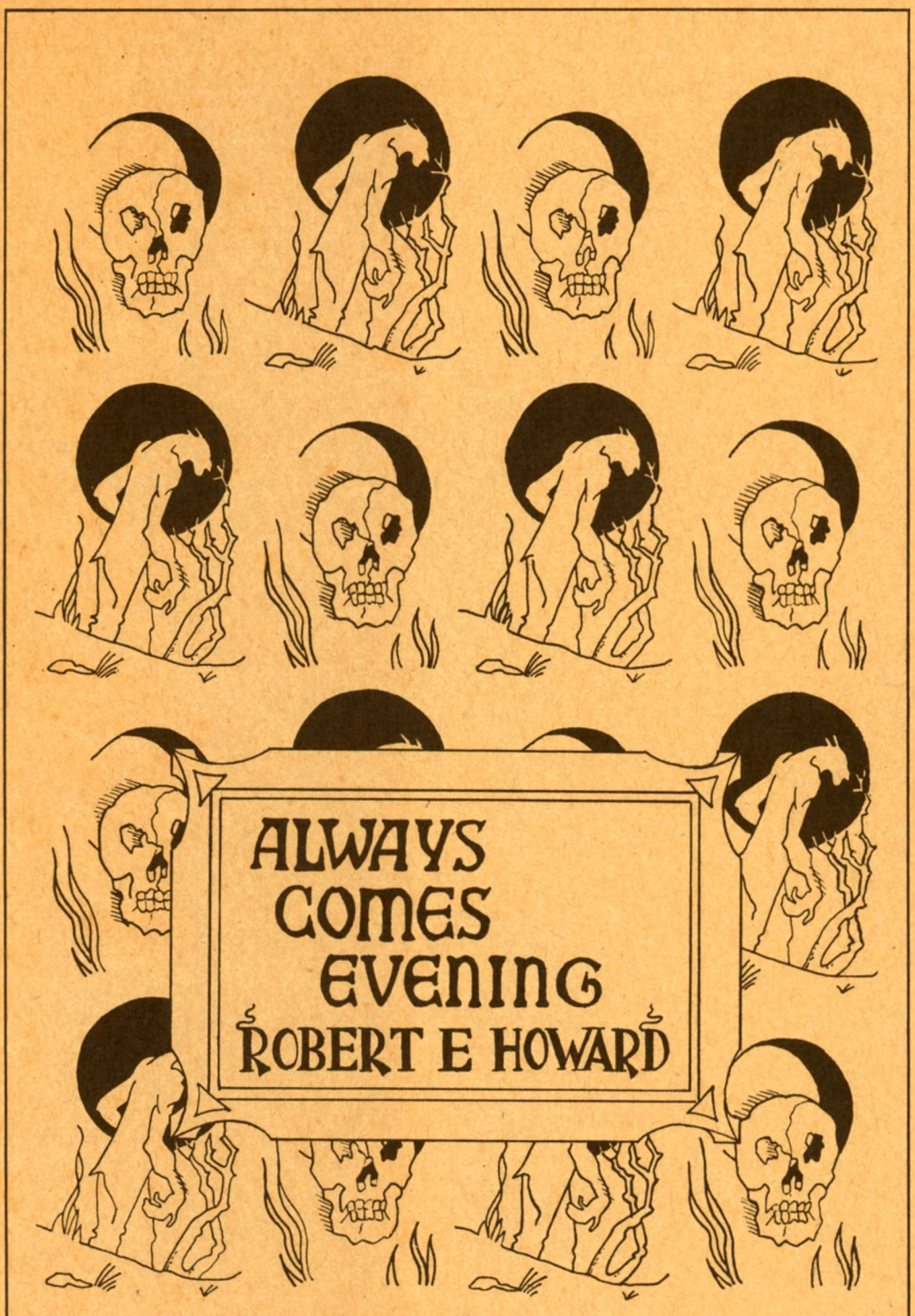


Frank Utpatel's drawing for the dust jacket of the original edition.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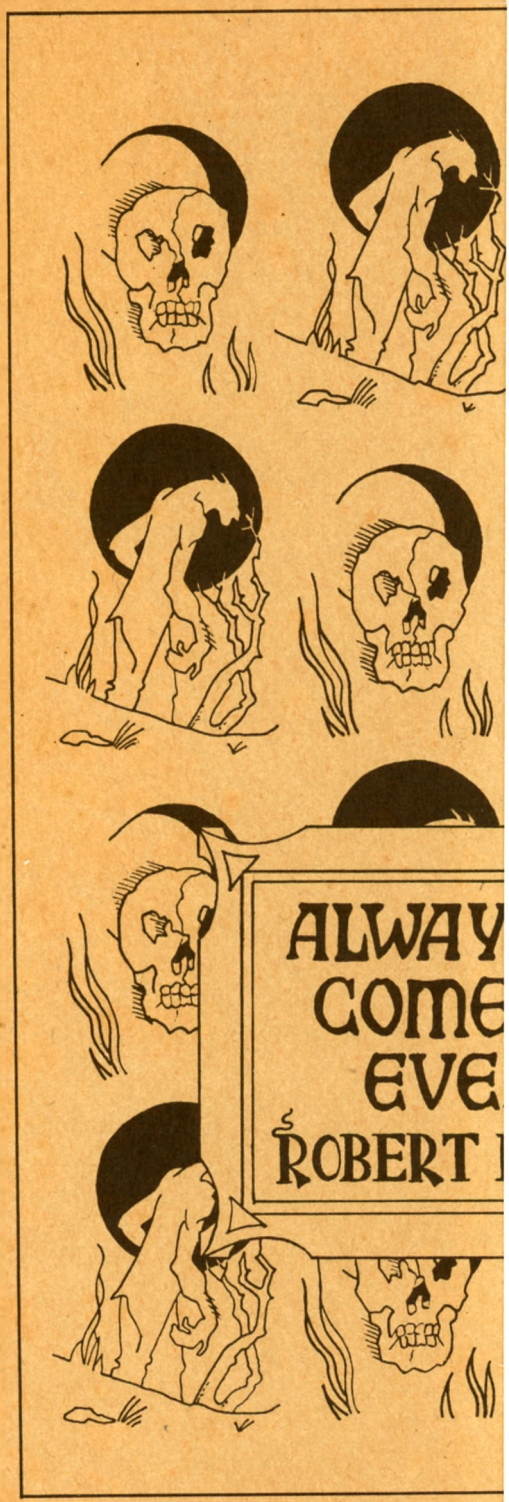

A native of Kyoto, Japan, Keiko Nelson has studied artistic expression in many countries. Her quest for innovative perspective is combined with a strong design background, rooted in the Bauhaus tradition. Spontaneous and precise, she brings to this edition of Always Comes Evening a rare vision of beauty and terror.